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A HISTORY OF POLAND

From the Earliest Times to the Present Day

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A HISTORY OF POLAND

FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE PRESENT DAY

BY

MAJOR F. E. WHITTON

WITH MAPS

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A HISTORY OF POLAND FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE PRESENT DAY

CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY OF POLAND

FOR a hundred and twenty years Poland has ceased to figure on the map of Europe, and, indeed, the very name has come to convey but a vague geographical impression, like Wessex or Navarre. Yet the national history of Poland had been long and glorious. For a whole century it had been the warden of Europe against the Turks; it had saved Vienna and Christianity; and, so late as the seventeenth century, it was geographically one of the largest States of Europe. Even as late as 1770 Poland was a vast country extending from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea, and lying between Russia and Germany, with an area of about 280,000 square miles and a population roughly estimated at eleven and a half millions. It stood third in the list of European countries as regards extent, and fifth in population.

And to-day, in spite of national disasters, Poland still represents an ethnographic group of more than twenty millions; in point of population it is seventh amongst the nationalities of Europe, and stands immediately next the Great Powers—Russia, Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy and Spain. The political and military causes which led to the blotting out of a nation with such vitality and such a history may well attract the attention of the most incurious; and, not least, at a moment when all Europe is in the crucible and the re-casting of a whole continent is in progress.

The early history of Poland is wrapped in obscurity, and amidst the incessant influx of the Asiatic nations into Europe during the slow decline of the Roman Empire it is almost impossible to trace the descent of the Poles. All that is known is that, in the wide plains extending from the Black Sea to the Baltic, and from the Oder to the Dwina, there roamed of old various uncouth tribes, who were later included in the wide generic term of Slavs. The actual ancestors of the Poles appear to have been the Sarmatians—a tribe located more particularly on both banks of the Vistula—who revolted against the Roman legions led by Varus; and it is from the captured insignia of the legionaries that the Polish emblem

of the white headed eagle is said to date its origin.* The actual word *Pole* is not older than the tenth century, and seems to have been applied not so much to the people as to the region they inhabited; *polska*, in the Slavonic tongue, signifying a level field or plain.

As a nation the Poles are not of ancient date, for, prior to the ninth century, they were split up into a multitude of tribes independent of each other and governed by their respective chiefs. No general head was known, except in case of invasion, when combination alone could save the country from the yoke; and the geographical limitation of the country was unsettled and obscure. During this era the history of Poland is to some extent legendary, and frequently touches the domain of unquestioned fable, so that it is unnecessary to record any but incontrovertible incidents. The greatest danger threatening the growing

* Another legend supplies a more commonplace origin for the national emblem. According to it King Lech I., who lived about the middle of the sixth century, was one day clearing away the ground which he had marked out for the site of a residence, when he found an eagle's nest. Hence he called the place Gnesna, from the Slavonic word *gniazda*, a nest, and adopted the representation of an eagle as the national crest. It may be stated that the eagle does not figure in the national arms until the twelfth century.

nation was from its western neighbour, Germany, in which Otto the Great revived the Imperial dignity in 962,* and, inspired by visions of universal dominion, extended his domination over Denmark, Norway, and the Czeches. Some ten or twelve years earlier Germanic influence had made itself felt along the Oder, and threatened to spread eastwards; but it was at this moment that Poland asserted its national existence and stepped into the arena of history. To the great racial question whether the growing Slav civilisation was to be absorbed and assimilated by Teutonic influence one Polish family offered an uncompromising negative. This was the family of the Piasts, who founded the dynasty of that name; made history for Poland; and under whose sway Poland was to become the greatest Slav State in Europe.

Though but of lowly origin the original Piast had been unanimously elected as the chief of Poland in the year 842, and a complete absence of foreign wars and internal commotions had signalised his wise, firm and paternal administration. His reign is often spoken of as the Golden Age of Poland. The reign of his successor, Ziemowit, was no less glorious, and is marked by military reforms which contributed to the

* See p. 33.

distinction which Poland subsequently enjoyed as the nursery of a fighting race. He was the first chief who introduced regular discipline into the Polish armies. Before his time they had fought without order or system, and, like all brave but undisciplined races, their tactics, though distinguished by an impetuous onset, were constantly marred by a no less precipitate retreat. Ziemowit, however, marshalled his warriors in due array; taught them to surrender their will to that of their officers; and, when fortune was adverse, to consult their safety, not in flight, but in a more stubborn resistance. These military reforms, when backed up by the unquestioned bravery of the Poles, quickly contributed to the growth of the young nation. Victory shone on the Polish arms, and the Hungarians, the Moravians and the Russians, who had hitherto insulted the country with impunity, were beaten in the field and forced to sue for peace.

Side by side with military success the internal condition of the country steadily progressed. In their infancy the Poles, like other branches of the great Slavonic family, were split up into independent tribes, each governed by its own *knyaz* or judge. But the attributes of this authority were entirely of a civil nature,

for military command was confided to another dignitary whose authority, however, was only for the continuation of actual war. These judges and generals, forming a semi-military hierarchy, were, during the period now under review, practically the only officers of State. In the general assemblies of the tribes, convoked to deliberate on peace or war, they acted as the duly elected representatives of their countrymen. Such assemblies were, at this time, of frequent occurrence, and, as they were attended by all who bore arms, they were numerously attended, for the cultivation of the soil was abandoned almost entirely to slaves and captives. The need of a small executive body, roughly corresponding to a modern Cabinet, was, therefore, imperative.

Such, in rough outline, were the general features of Poland prior to the accession of Miecislas I., the first Christian Duke of Poland, with whom opened the really authentic history of the country.

The entry of Poland into the domain of history synchronises with, and, indeed, is possibly due to, a significant event which occurred in the middle of the tenth century. When the Duke Miecislas assumed the reins of sovereignty both he and his subjects were strangers to Christianity even in name. At that time almost all the kingdoms of

the North were shrouded in idolatry; a small portion of the Saxons had indeed just received the light of the Gospel, as had also some of the Hungarians; but the beams were feeble and scarce able to pierce the general blackness of paganism. It so happened that the Duke of Poland sought the hand of Dombrowka, daughter of Bolesas, King of Hungary, both of whom had embraced the Christian faith; but so abhorrent to father and daughter was the prospect of Christian mating with unbeliever that the proposal was rejected save on the condition that the wooer should acknowledge himself as of the true faith. After some deliberation he consented; he procured instructors, and was soon made acquainted with the doctrines which he was required to believe, and the duties he was bound to practise. The royal maiden was accordingly conducted to his capital in the year 965; and the day which witnessed his regeneration by the waters of baptism beheld him also receive the other sacrament of marriage.

"Decisive loves that have materially influenced the drama of the world" may thus include the ducal affection which opened the gates for the beneficent flood of Christianity into Poland. But it is certain that, in embracing Christianity, Miecislas was influenced by more statesmanlike

motives than mere human passion. When he came to the throne the *Drang nach Osten* of Germany was in full swing, and, in 959, he was forced to acknowledge the supremacy of the Emperor, and to render him annual tribute. Miecislas clearly foresaw that armed opposition to German aggression was beyond his powers, and, realising that the Germans employed the pretext of the diffusion of religion as a cloak to cover their schemes of territorial aggrandisement, he determined to forestall the intruders and to remove all pretext for evangelisation by spontaneously accepting baptism. The result, whatever may have been the motive inspiring it, was immediate and far-reaching. Poland could now claim the powerful protection of the Holy See, and, by acknowledging the faith of civilised mankind, she made her formal entry into the society of European nations. Of scarcely less importance was the fact that, though relegated to the eastern regions of Europe, the Poles definitely became a Western people. Unlike the natives of the Danube and Dnieper plains, who received their Christianity from Byzantium, the Poles took their faith from Rome, and thus participated, from the outset, in Latin civilisation. Not that Germany abstained from her mission of evangelisation, for German priests worked

incessantly in Poland; but, if Miecislas accepted them, he counteracted their influence by summoning ecclesiastics from Italy and France. By every method he showed his determination to resist what he believed—rightly or wrongly—to be the interested proselytism of his Teutonic neighbours.

However much Miecislas may have been influenced by statecraft, the zeal with which he laboured for the conversion of his subjects left no doubt as to his sincerity in his new faith. Having dismissed his seven concubines, he issued an order for the destruction of all the idols throughout the country. In spite of some initial opposition, his wishes were gradually carried into effect, thanks, in a large measure, to the support he received from the nobles. These, to prove their sincerity when present at public worship, half drew their sabres at the intonation of the *Gloria tibi, Domine*, thereby showing that they were ready to defend their new creed with their blood—a custom which survived in Poland for fully seven centuries. Their example, the devoted labours of the missionaries, and the unswerving sincerity of the duke, produced the desired result; and when Miecislas issued his edict in 980 that every Pole, who had not already submitted to the rite, should forthwith repair to the waters of baptism, he was

obeyed without a murmur. Traces of the old Adam, however, still lingered in the land, and, to the disappointment of Miecislas, Pope Benedict refused to erect Poland into a kingdom, although this honour was conferred upon Hungary about this time.

CHAPTER II

FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE DIVISION OF POLAND INTO GOVERNMENTS

THE introduction of Christianity and the consequent internal progress which it brought about did not, however, render Poland immune from the necessity of struggling for existence against her powerful neighbours. The burning question at the end of the tenth century was still the growing power of Germany. The Emperor had committed the indiscretion of parcelling out his eastern frontier into several margravates, each inferior in strength to Poland; and to Miecislas the favourable moment for an offensive seemed to have arrived. He entered upon a campaign against the Saxons; but, though successful in the field, he was forced to desist from hostilities at the command of Otto, to restore the territory he had seized, and, more serious than all, to acknowledge himself as the vassal of the Emperor. Foiled in his courageous attempt to free himself from the shackles of the west, Miecislas now found himself face to face with peril to the east. The Russian Grand Duke Vladimir the Great, after

triumphing over the Greeks, invaded Poland and captured several towns. The Bug now formed the western frontier of the descendants of Rurik, but, just as the Empire was manifesting a pronounced tendency to spread towards the east, so Russia was slowly but stolidly expanding westwards. Caught between the jaws of this double movement, the position of Poland was unenviable. But the difficulties of concerted action between widely-separated States and the strategic virtue of interior lines possessed by the intermediate nation were more potent even than to-day. Conjoint efforts between Germany and Muscovy were impossible. Several years elapsed between the intervention of Otto and the aggression of Vladimir, and Miecislas was enabled to arrest, if he could not destroy, the torrent of invasion from the east, and to impose a barrier which forced Vladimir to turn to other enterprises. In these operations, the military outlook of the leaders of Poland at this time was of a striking order. Attack was considered the best defence. In 989 Miecislas led an expedition against another troublesome neighbour—Bohemia. His son seized Silesia and the upper Vistula from the Czechs, and tore territory from the Hungarians. That son was Bolesas I., surnamed the Lion-hearted, and called the Polish Charlemagne. By the time he had

fairly settled himself on his throne, Poland was a great State, containing 200,000 inhabitants and stretching from the Baltic to the Carpathians.

All Germany was now alarmed at the progress of Polish arms, and the Emperor Otto III., who was then in Italy, resolved to return by a somewhat circuitous route and to pay the Polish duke a visit. He was received with a magnificence which surprised him; and, whether influenced by the lavishness of the reception bestowed upon him or guided by the dictates of policy, he granted a boon long craved by Bolesas. Poland was elevated into a kingdom, and the royal crown was placed upon the duke's head by the Emperor's own hands.* The new king, however was not long allowed to wear his new honours unmolested. A succession of wars with the Empire and Bohemia sorely tried the resources of the growing kingdom. The record of these struggles is obscure, and it will be sufficient to observe that what little advantage was gained in them fell to the lot of Bolesas, until the Peace of Bautzen, in 1018, restored peace to the lacerated State. Poland had gained terri-

* According to another account, Bolesas in vain importuned both the Emperor and the Pope on the question of his elevation to the royal dignity; and, on Christmas day, 1024, a few months before his death, crowned himself at Gnesna.

tory at the expense of the Empire; her frontier now marched with the head waters of the Elbe; and the fetters of Germany, though not yet thrown off, had been rendered less galling than before.

Although Bolesas had been thus occupied with his efforts against the Germans. he was forced to guard his eastern frontier against Russian aggression. The Peace of Bautzen set him free to attempt to regain the territory which had been filched by Vladimir from Miecislas, and he marched against the *de facto* sovereign Yaroslav, whom he encountered on the banks of the Bug. The enemy was powerful and well posted, and Bolesas, for some time, hesitated to force a passage. But a Russian soldier on the further bank, deriding the corpulency of the Polish king, goaded that monarch into action; and outraged vanity triumphed over tactical considerations. Bolesas plunged into the waters, followed by his more intrepid followers, and the action resulted in victory for the Polish arms. The rich city of Kieff was taken, and Poland stretched eastwards to the Dniester.

Bolesas died in 1025, leaving behind him the reputation of the greatest sovereign of the age. He was the true founder of his country's greatness. The succession of victories which he had achieved

gained for him the title of *Chrobri* or Lion-hearted. But amid all the cares of war he found time to attend to the interior organisation of his country, and, not least, to carrying out important reforms in its military system. He gradually brought into being a well-organised regular army, divided into fractions of one thousand, one hundred, and ten men respectively, which, so far as the infantry were concerned, corresponded generally with the battalion, company and section of modern days. He also formed two corps of cavalry—the heavy cavalry, which was equipped with cuirasses, and the light cavalry with which Poland was to win imperishable renown. A military college in embryo was also provided in the corps of noble youths by whom he was surrounded, and whose skill in arms and military exercises was to form the model for the army at large.

The manners of this period are thus described by Dlugoss:—"The Polish nobles thirst for military fame; dangers, and even death, they despise; they are lavish of their revenues, faithful to their sovereign, taking pleasure in agricultural pursuits and the breeding of cattle. They are open towards strangers, and afford to other nations the finest example of hospitality and beneficence; but they oppress their peasantry. The country people are much addicted to drunkenness; hence quarrels,

wounds, sometimes murder. They are, however, patient and accustomed to the most rigorous labours; they support, without complaining, hunger, cold, and every other privation. They believe in magic, and never scruple at robbery or plunder. They care little about comfort in their dwellings."

The successor of the Charlemagne of Poland was wholly incapable.* Cowardly, dissipated and despicable, he soon showed himself totally unfitted for governing such a turbulent people as the Poles or for repressing his powerful and ambitious neighbours. One internal reform alone stands to his credit: the distribution of the country into palatinates, each presided over by a local judge—a feature which contributed, in a marked degree, to the more speedy and effectual administration of justice. Such was the sole contribution of a prince who died unwept, unhonoured, and unsung, leaving behind him a son of too tender an age to grasp the reins of sovereignty.

This circumstance retarded the advance of Poland in a deplorable fashion. To the Slavs the idea of kingship had never yet been really welcome, and the elevation of Bolesas the Lion-hearted had seemed the negation of the Slav principle of regarding the supreme power as a divisible heritage. To the haughty Polish nobles who despised the

* Miecislas II., surnamed the Idle, 1025–1034.

sway of a woman, the rule of the young prince's mother, who was nominated as regent, seemed an added affront, increased by the fact that she was of the hated German race. These discontented aristocrats banded themselves into a confederacy whose ostensible object was to procure the dismissal of all foreigners, but whose real one was to seize the supreme power. The condition of the country was soon one of unrelieved wretchedness. The regent and her son Casimir sought safety in flight. Innumerable parties contended for leadership. There was no authority, no law, and no obedience; the whole country was cursed by the lawless rule of local petty sovereigns; and against such rule was soon directed a general rising of the unfortunate peasants, whose object was to revenge themselves on the intolerable tyrants who oppressed them. In a word, Poland was consigned to a universal debauch of anarchy. Armed bands scoured the country, seizing all that was valuable, and destroying everything which could not be removed. Women were violated. Old and young were massacred. Priests and bishops were slain at the altar. Nuns were ravished in the depths of the cloisters. As might have been expected, the neighbouring States which had felt the heel of Bolesas the Great were not slow to avail themselves of such a favourable

opportunity for revenge. From the east came the savage Yaroslav with fire and sword, making a desert of the districts through which he passed. On the other flank, the Duke of Bohemia, aflame with vengeance, sacked Breslau, Posen and Gnesna, anticipating, by his revolting cruelties, the war system of Central Europe of ten centuries later.

The distracted kingdom was to receive assistance from an unlooked-for quarter. The aim of the Duke of Bohemia was to aggrandise himself at the expense of Poland, and to make himself ruler of a mighty Slav State—a project which was by no means acceptable to the Emperor. During the sombre centuries of the Middle Ages, the policy of the Empire, though confusing at times, was, in reality, marked by one guiding principle. That principle was to act as a counterpoise between the neighbouring States, and when one threatened to acquire a position of dangerous stability to throw the weight of the resources of Central Europe into the scale against it. The Empire had resisted, to the full extent of its power, the rise of Poland; but it was now alarmed at its rapid decline, and the Emperor seconded the efforts of the more rational of the Poles to rescue their country from destruction. An assembly was convoked at Gnesna. All, except a few lawless chiefs who wished to perpetuate the reign of

untrammelled brutality, voted for a king; and, after some deliberation, an overwhelming majority decreed the recall of prince Casimir.

Casimir "the Restorer" proved himself worthy of the confidence reposed in him by his people. The task which confronted him was immense, but he did not flinch from its solution. He swept back the tide of paganism which was once again submerging the country, and, by reducing the nobles to obedience, he limited the influence of feudalism, which had been introduced by the Germans, and, abhorrent as it was to the genius of the Slavs, had been one of the most fruitful causes of the previous disorders. Of his foreign policy the most outstanding circumstance was the defeat he inflicted upon the pagan Prussians, as a result of which these uncouth savages, who dwelt on the Baltic littoral, were compelled to acknowledge themselves the vassals of Poland and to pay an annual tribute. Casimir, however, had been able to restore his country only by the aid of the Polish aristocracy from within, and by the assistance of the Empire from without. These services were no outcome of patriotism and philanthropy; they were rendered for reward. The Emperor was enabled to re-assert his suzerainty and to demand a substantial tribute, while the aristocratic faction of Poland, in which were com-

prised not merely the nobles but highly-placed ecclesiastics, was able to extend its influence, and to become a preponderating influence in the public life of the country. Gradually there grew up around the sovereign a permanent council, in which is discernible the germ of the senate of the republic. Casimir died in 1058, the regenerator no less than the restorer of his country. His memory is still dear to every Pole.

The formation of a regular senate was, however, slow, and was completed only when experience had proved its utility. On the division of the country into palatinates by Miecislas II.,* the palatines became the privileged advisers of the sovereign, as were also the bishops, who, after the introduction of Christianity, were joined with the temporal barons in the exercise of this privilege. These officials gradually usurped, and then claimed as a hereditary right, the judicial power; so that, however absolute in theory was the authority of the king, he could not but quail before the formidable body he had allowed to come into being. The multiplication of towns, and the increase in their population and wealth, also gave rise to a change in the internal administration; for these, fretting against the feudal laws, purchased exemption from them. Town

* See p. 16.

after town secured, either by the avarice or the favour of the sovereign, charters which empowered them to substitute municipal for feudal law. The result was a legal chaos; and uniformity of laws was practically unknown until the reign of Casimir III.

The succeeding eighty years in the history of Poland are marked by the continuance of the unending struggles with such neighbours as Muscovy, Bohemia and Hungary; the persistent effort to escape from the strangling coils of the Empire; and a conflict with the mighty power of Rome. Separated from Hungary by the Carpathians, and from Bohemia by a no less formidable mountain range, Poland contented herself in general with a defensive attitude towards those rival States. On the other hand, the *trouée* of the Oder gave the Czechs access to the rich Silesian valley, which was a natural dependency of Poland. This circumstance produced centuries of hostilities between the two nations, which the diplomatists of the Empire did their best to foster. On the other frontier Poland continued to carry out successful operations against Muscovy. The monarch of that country had committed the fatal, but in that period, the common, error of dividing his inheritance among his children, thereby opening the door to the most unnatural of contests. The successor

of Casimir* took up arms ostensibly to assist one of the rival claimants, but, in reality, to recover the possessions which his predecessors had held in Muscovy, as well as the domains which he conceived he had a right to inherit through his mother and his queen—for, like his father, he had wedded a Russian princess. The Polish sovereign penetrated to Kieff, which he invested and took, thereafter reducing Przemysl, an ancient dependency of Poland. Retracing his steps, he again laid siege to Kieff, which had been wrested from his nominee during his absence, and again fought a victorious battle, still determined to restore the prince whose cause he had espoused, but no less fixed in his intention to make him tributary to Poland.

The energetic manner in which the Polish sovereigns threw themselves into their struggles with Muscovy has exposed them to the charge of an overweening ambition towards territorial expansion to the east. It has, however, been well remarked that, during this period, although Poland was furnished with natural frontiers to the west, north and south, her territory lay absolutely open and unguarded to the east—a region peopled by unknown tribes, and one from which unexpected dangers might suddenly

* Bolesas II., surnamed the Bold, 1058–1081.

arise. The instinctive longing for security may well explain enterprises which, at first sight, seem unnecessary and hazardous, but, on reflection, will show themselves to be incidents in a natural struggle to a safe and well-defined frontier. Between the Baltic and the Black Sea, the Dwina and the Dnieper formed an almost continuous river line, which would provide an effective barrier against incursions from the east. It was the attainment of this frontier which was constantly before the eyes of the Polish leaders.

Though Bolesas the Bold could keep the Emperor at arm's length, and could chastise his other and less powerful neighbours, he was beaten to his knees by the spiritual power of Rome. After his successes in the east a difference took place between the sovereign and the Church. The exact cause of the rupture is obscure; but, whether it was the result of political intrigue, fostered in the Empire, in which the ecclesiastical power sided with the discontented nobles, or whether it was that Stanislas, Bishop of Cracow, took it upon himself to reproach the king for his licentious orgies, one thing is clear. Stanislas excommunicated his sovereign, and was soon afterwards murdered, apparently by the king's own hand. But neither Bolesas of Poland nor Henry of England could murder an ecclesiastic with

impunity. Gregory VII. hurled the thunders of the Church against the murderer, whom he deposed from the royal dignity, and, at the same time, placed an interdict upon the whole kingdom. The result was fatal to Bolesas and disastrous to his country. The king fled his dominions, and his end is wrapt in obscurity. For more than two centuries the royal title was withheld, and the rulers of Poland—as dukes—were unable to repress anarchy at home or to command respect abroad so vigorously as had been done by the kings their predecessors.

After the disappearance of Bolesas, Poland remained without a head for almost a whole year, until the incursions of the Russians and Hungarians—the latter of whom reduced Cracow—led the nobles to summon to the vacant throne Vladislas, son of Casimir the Restorer and brother of the unfortunate Bolesas. The mild and benevolent disposition of the new Polish leader induced Gregory VII. to relent, and the interdict was withdrawn. But, as has been already told, the royal dignity was withheld. Vladislas was allowed to reign as duke, but no Polish prelate dared anoint him king. This derogation encouraged his fierce neighbours to revolt, and the Russians recovered the conquests made by Bolesas the Bold; while, not long after, the Prussians, a people more

savage, though perhaps less stupid, than the ancient Muscovites, prepared to invade his dominions. After some variations of victory and defeat, these barbarians were, however, beaten, and Prussia and Pomerania submitted. The wars of the duke against Bohemia were less decisive, but, on the whole, victory inclined to the Polish arms. These foreign troubles paled before the dissensions caused within the country by a family feud which was to be prolific of misfortune. Before his marriage the duke had a natural son, called Sbiquiew, whose depravity made him a veritable scourge to his country. As not infrequently has been the case with the illegitimate scions of a royal house, Sbiquiew became the head of a discontented faction and took up arms against his sire. The traitor, with his mercenary army of Prussians, was defeated and subsequently pardoned; but quarrels of the most bitter nature broke out between the bastard and the lawful heir, the young Bolesas. Alarmed at the prospect of civil wars which might arise after his decease, Vladislas took the fatal resolution of announcing the intended division of his States between his two sons. But this expedient became the source of the worst troubles, and was to prove dangerous to the existence, and fatal to the prosperity, of Poland.

Bolesas III., the bravest prince of his age,

was not the man lightly to endure the aggression of a debauched bastard. Supported by the Russians and Hungarians, he engaged his brother, who allied himself with the Empire, Bohemia and Pomerania, and defeated him; with the result that all Poland was now once again under one sceptre. This, however, did not prevent the Emperor making—indeed, possibly it induced him to make—the most extravagant demands on Bolesas. He required the latter not only to render the homage of a vassal, but even to surrender one-half of his possessions; to which the intrepid Bolesas replied that he preferred to lose Poland in endeavouring to preserve its independence rather than to retain it at the price of what he considered an ignominy. Hostilities were thus again precipitated, and the Emperor Henry V. took the field. His Bohemian allies, however, deserted him, and, weakened by their defection, the Emperor slowly retreated, pursued by the Poles to the vast plains before Breslau, where the Emperor turned at bay. Here, in 1110, the arms of Germany went down in disaster on the memorable Field of Dogs, so-called from the pariah legions which devoured the bodies of the German dead. These were to be counted in thousands, for the Poles, unsurpassed in ferocity by any of the fighting races of Europe, had committed

horrible carnage on all those unable to flee. Peace was soon declared, sealed by political marriages, and the incubus of Germanism was once more shaken off.

The career of Bolesas III. was one of almost unchequered victory. Until four years before his death, his arms were almost invariably successful. He had repeatedly discomfited the Bohemians and Pomeranians; he had humbled the pride of emperors; and had twice dictated laws to Hungary and gained signal triumphs over Muscovy. But, towards the end of his reign, he was surprised and defeated on the Dniester by a vastly superior force of Russians and Hungarians, and, in 1139, the victor in forty-seven battles and the bravest prince of his age, died a broken man. His very death was pregnant with misfortune for his country. The Slav tradition that supreme power was a divisible heritage, although in direct contradiction to the most elementary principles of good government and political stability, swayed Bolesas before his end. Following the fatal precedent of his father, he divided his dominions among his sons, thus opening a period of over one hundred and fifty years which is distinguished by little more than the dissensions of rival princes and the progressive decay of a once powerful nation.

CHAPTER III

THE NEIGHBOURS OF POLAND IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

IT is now necessary to interrupt the story of the gradual rise of Poland in order to take a brief survey of the nations by which it was surrounded, for the history of Poland was, to a great extent, rough-hewn by the action of its neighbours. To begin with, in the narrative, so far, frequent reference has been made to "The Empire," "The Emperor," "Imperial policy," and so forth, and it is well to make absolutely clear what was the political entity connoted by such terms. For nearly ten centuries, from the birth of the Middle Ages to the dawn of the nineteenth century, the two words, "The Empire," are to be found printed across the map of west-central Europe, and a brief explanation of their exact history and significance will not be out of place.

The Empire had its direct origin in Rome, and may properly be said to date from the battle of Actium, fought in 31 B.C. There Mark Antony

was completely defeated by Octavius Cæsar, and, on his return to Rome, the victor was created Emperor by the senate, and the republic of Rome then ceased to be. Hardly had a generation passed away when a blow was struck at the Roman Empire which was to redound throughout the world. In A.D. 9 Arminius—*Liberator haud dubie Germaniæ*—defeated the Roman legions under Varus, and that victory secured at once and for ever the independence of the Teutonic race. Rome sent, indeed, her legions into Germany once again to parade a temporary superiority; but all hopes of permanent conquest were abandoned by Augustus and his successors. And thus *Germany*, which was, to a great extent, identified with "The Empire" of the Middle Ages, was started on its career. But the point to remember is that, by the beginning of the Christian era, Germany had become separated from, and was indeed, to a great extent, practically independent of, the Roman Empire.

In spite of the loss of its hold over Germany, the expansion of the Roman Empire went on apace, reaching its greatest territorial extent under Trajan, at the end of the first century of the Christian era. Nearly two hundred years later its bulk led to a project of re-organisation and division, but it was reunited under the Emperor

Constantine. That monarch was to exert an enormous influence on the history of the world. Rome had become the seat of Christianity, and Constantine was the first Christian emperor; and, in A.D. 330, he transferred the seat of government from Rome to Byzantium, which was thereafter known by its present name of Constantinople. The necessity of dividing the Roman Empire still, however, remained, and, in 395 A.D., a final division was made by the Emperor Theodosius. It was henceforth to form two empires—the Byzantine or *Eastern* Empire, consisting generally of Syria, Asia Minor, and the Balkan Peninsula; and the *Western* Empire, made up of the remainder of the original structure, including Rome itself. The Church, no less than the temporal power of the Empire, was likewise divided, the Orthodox or Greek Church having its headquarters at Byzantium, and the Roman Church preserving its connection with the original see of Rome.

The direct influence of the Eastern Empire upon Poland was practically *nil*, for, as has been already narrated, unlike the other Slavonic nations, Poland accepted Christianity from the south and west, and not from Byzantium in the east. It will, therefore, be convenient to deal with the Eastern Empire within a few words. The old traditions of order and civilisation were preserved

for centuries in that empire, in which such rulers as Justinian were able to some extent to resist the pressure of its barbarian enemies. In spite of invasions by Avars, Bulgarians and Slavs, and in spite of Persian wars and Saracen conquests, the superior civilisation, experience and intelligence of the Eastern Empire managed to avert catastrophe for over a thousand years. The end came in 1453, when Constantinople fell before the Turkish forces of the Sultan Mahomet II. But though, as has been explained, the direct influence of the Eastern Empire on Poland was negligible, its ruin forced Poland to the front. From Constantinople the Turks spread westwards over Europe, and their legions were not shattered till they broke against the Hungarians and the Poles.

To revert once again to the Western Empire, it is needless to do more than mention the attacks made upon it for a century after its formation by Goths, Vandals and Huns. Sufficient is it to say that, though the Huns under Attila were driven off, the Roman Emperors could no longer defend their capital, and, in 476, the line of Roman Emperors in the west came to an end. The central power, with the exclusive rule of Roman law and Roman administration, thereupon disappeared, though the Roman Church and the idea of

municipal government still survived. With the fall of the Western Empire, there began the period generally known in history as the Dark Ages, which lasted for just over three centuries. But during this time new nations in Gaul, Italy, Germany, Spain, England, and Scandinavia were gradually, but slowly, imbibing the elements of civilisation. The Teutonic races were gradually embracing Christianity and modelling their laws upon Roman law and government; while, further to the west, the French, Spanish and Italian races were assimilating the culture and language known as Latin. Out of this welter of peoples there stood forth a Germanic nation, which had settled in the north of what is now France some five centuries before the Christian era. These were the Franks, and, of the Franks, Charles the Great—or Charlemagne—became king in the year 768. By a succession of victorious wars he enlarged his dominions. He conquered the Lombards and re-established the Pope at Rome, who, in return, acknowledged Charles as suzerain of Italy. And, in 800, Pope Leo III., in the name of the Roman people, solemnly crowned Charlemagne at Rome as Emperor of the Roman Empire of the West. The year 800 may be said to mark the beginning of modern Europe. The Western Empire, or the Holy Roman Empire—to give it its more formal

title*—now consisted roughly of the modern kingdoms of France, Germany, and the greater part of Italy.

Charles the Great died in 814, and, some years before his death, he had divided his kingdom among his sons. Evil times began again for Europe, and the ninth century proved disastrous to civilisation and Christianity. Disunion and weakness prevailed upon the Continent. It seemed as if civilised Europe was about to become the prey to barbarism; and, in 887, the kingdom of the West Franks—or France—separated for ever from the Empire, which now lay in a condition of abeyance until Otto the Great, King of Germany, was crowned Emperor of the Romans by the Pope at Rome, in 962, thus reviving the Holy Roman Empire and uniting it to the German kingdom. Henceforth the "Holy Roman Empire of the German nation" was recognised, and the close connection between Italy and Germany continued till the nineteenth century. During the reign of the Emperor Henry III., from 1039–1056, the Holy Roman Empire reached the zenith of its power; but, thereafter, its influence waned before the rising dominance of the Roman Church. Otto the Great, though working in alliance with

* The epithet "Holy" was, however, not definitely added until the time of Frederick Barbarossa (1152–1190).

the Pope, had always subordinated the ecclesiastical to the imperial power; but, from the middle of the eleventh century, the Papacy began to shake itself free from dependence on the Emperor, and, at the end of that century, Gregory VII.—he who hurled the thunders of the Church against the King of Poland—went still higher in his claims. The Papacy began to aim at the lordship of the world. Gregory was resolved that the Papacy should be a universal monarchy, to which should be subordinated all the kingdoms and principalities of the world. "The Pope," he wrote, "is the master of Emperors."

To such a claim it was only natural that powerful Teutonic monarchs should demur; and, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the great struggle between the Empire and the Papacy went on. The greatest contestant on the former side was Frederick I., or Barbarossa, who reigned from 1152 to 1190; but even this mighty warrior, in 1177, had to submit—"abandoning his Imperial dignity, he threw himself humbly at the feet of the Pope." The victory of the Papacy was supreme, and when the grandson of Barbarossa* passed away, although the theory of the Holy Roman Empire continued, the Empire became little more than a German kingship. It held together suffi-

* Frederick II. (1212–1250).

ciently long for the flimsy structure to receive its final blow from Napoleon; but, from about the opening of the thirteenth century, the Holy Roman Empire as such was practically non-existent, and Germany—or The Empire, as it was still called —took its place. Thus, by the irony of history, the race which had thrown off the yoke of the old original Roman Empire, was destined to be the one to retain the shadow of its title until the first years of the nineteenth century.

A brief sketch such as that just given, in which all but the most striking events are omitted, and in which whole centuries are dealt with in a single line, must necessarily be incomplete. But it will serve its purpose if the reader is assisted in realising what the western neighbour of Poland in the Middle Ages actually was. One point is worth bearing in mind. The small State of Prussia was then outside of, and formed no part of, the Empire. Centuries later it was called in as the factor to adjust the encumbered property of Germany, and, by a policy of confiscation and aggrandisement, to exalt itself into the position of the chief proprietor.

On its southern frontier Poland marched with Hungary, where dwelt the Hungarians or Magyars, who belonged to the Mongolian race. These first appeared towards the end of the ninth century,

and, under Arpad, their chief, established themselves in Dacia in 889. A strong, virile race, they went so far as to invade Germany, and with such success that, for a time, the Emperors were forced to pay them tribute, until the Emperor Henry the Fowler overthrew them at Merseburg in 934, and Otto the Great defeated them later at Augsburg. But, in spite of these defeats, Hungary still pressed westwards, coming into collision with the Saracens in Provence. Unlike the Saracens, the Hungarians embraced Christianity, and, about 980, Pope Benedict elevated the country into a kingdom, an honour denied to Poland at the time. The growing power of the Empire proved too strong for its lesser neighbours, and during the reign of the Emperor Henry III. (1039–1056) Hungary, as well as Poland and Bohemia, became its vassal—a condition which prevailed through the following century.

The Russia which formed the eastern neighbour of Poland was far different in extent and power from the great nation that bears the name to-day.* From the vague indications of Slavonic chronicles it would seem that what is now, roughly speaking, Russia was then divided between two races—a

* The name "Russia," *i.e.* the "land of the Russ," coined on a false analogy with Graecia, was not introduced until the eighteenth century.

north-western race, paying a tribute of pelts to the Northmen; and a south-eastern race, paying a similar tribute to the Chazars, a nomadic people whose habitat was chiefly along the Volga. Somewhat later the northern tribes invited the northern chieftain Rurik to come and rule over their hopelessly distracted communities, and, with the coming of Rurik, about 862, Russian history may be said to begin. His successor, Oleg, extended his dominions southwards at the expense of the Chazars and made Kieff his capital. From here expeditions were launched against Constantinople; but these met with no lasting success, and, in 945, a perpetual peace was made with the Greeks, or, in other words, the Eastern Roman Empire. About the middle of the tenth century the term, "the land of Rus," is first met with, and, almost at the same time, Christianity was introduced; though, unlike Poland, Russia received the faith from Constantinople, and was formally received into the Orthodox Eastern Church. Thus the narrow strip of territory from Kieff to Novgorod became the nucleus of a new Christian State and the origin of the later Russian Empire. It had a hard struggle to survive, for, in addition to the incursions of a Mongolian race which had supplanted the Chazars, another enemy had arisen in the west beyond the Bug, in the shape of the young kingdom of Poland. These two nations

first came into serious collision on the death of Vladimir the Great, when Bolesas intervened in a dynastic quarrel, and the struggle between the two was of long duration. In the west, however, Russia obtained a temporary relief. For the great national hero, Vladimir Monomakh, by a decisive victory beyond the Don in 1109, freed Russia from the yoke of various Mongolian tribes, till these latter were supplemented by the terrible Tatars of the Middle Ages.

Little need now be said of Poland's immediate neighbours to the north-east, the wild Prussians. This small Slavonic race had not yet received civilisation from the Teutonic Knights,* a process which largely took the form of a war of extermination, and as yet exerted but little influence on the fortunes of the Polish kingdom. Beyond them, and stretching along the Baltic littoral to the Gulf of Finland, lay the Lithuanians. This interesting people originally dwelt among the impenetrable forests and marshes of the Upper Niemen, where they were able to preserve their primitive savagery longer than any of their neighbours, and to foster a valour which made them formidable enemies to the surrounding States. Till the year 1000 the history of Lithuania is almost entirely mythical, and, by the twelfth century,

* See p. 42.

all that can be said of its inhabitants is that they were gradually spreading south, fiercely holding their own in their national struggle for existence, and still outside the pale of Christian nations. Although by the middle of the twelfth century Lithuania and Prussia had not yet exerted any appreciable influence on the history of Poland, they were later to be intimately connected with it—Lithuania by a union under the same sceptre, and Prussia as the robber of a third part of the kingdom.

CHAPTER IV

FROM THE DEATH OF BOLESAS III. TO THE RESTORATION OF THE MONARCHY

BY the will of the Duke Bolesas III., Poland was divided among his four elder sons. There remained a fifth and youngest son, Casimir, to whom nothing was bequeathed. When asked why the best beloved of his children should have been thus passed over, the Duke is said to have replied that a four-wheeled chariot must have a driver—a homely prophecy which was, in due time, to be fulfilled. The fatal effects of the division were soon apparent, and, although the eldest brother was nominally in the position of a mere suzerain, he soon showed that he was aiming at nothing less than absolute monarchy, and a fierce fratricidal struggle was the result, in which the clergy espoused the cause of the younger princes, and the elder was put to flight. The eldest of the remaining brothers was elected to the vacant dignity, and his reign is distinguished by the efforts he made to avoid the Germanisation of his kingdom by measuring his strength against an overwhelming force of Imperialists and Bohemians,

not without success. An expedition against the Prussians, who had now renounced Christianity and returned to their ancient idolatry, was successfully carried out; but, in a second expedition, the Polish troops were drawn on into a marshy country and, surprised by the fierce natives, were almost annihilated. A third brother mounted the throne when death had claimed the second, but the condition of the country had become so unsettled—the nobles, the clergy, and the people were so openly in revolt, and the desire for a ruler, untrammelled by the hateful testament of Bolesas III., was so marked—that the youngest brother, Casimir, was almost unanimously elected as Duke of Poland in 1178. Until the restoration of the monarchy, over a century later, a bare recital of the reigns of the various ducal occupants of the throne is merely a record of incompetence, dissension and decay. It is more profitable to turn to a survey of the influences, both internal and external, which were shaping the destinies of the country.

About 1230 the Prussians penetrated into the very heart of Poland, exceeding, if possible, their former ferocity. The result was disaster for the Poles; but the remedy by which they hoped to free themselves from the threatening danger was, if possible, more harmful in the end. The fatal

remedy was to call in the aid of the Teutonic Knights to repel the pagans.

Like the Knights Templars and the Knights of St. John, the Teutonic Knights owed their origin to a charitable endeavour to mitigate the sufferings caused by the Crusades. During the siege of Acre eight Germans, shocked by the agonies of the wounded, of which they were helpless spectators, banded themselves into a small organisation to relieve the wants of the sufferers. On the reduction of Acre a church and hospital were built for them within the city, and subsequently similar buildings were erected at Jerusalem. The Order was at first distinguished for humility, and was approved, in 1191, by the Emperor Henry VI. and Pope Celestine III. By the statutes of the Order the knights were bound to be of noble descent, and were sworn to celibacy and the defence of the Christian Church; and, for some time, they were distinguished by the austerity of their lives. But, as was to happen with other Orders of a monastic-military organisation, the cult of asceticism gave way in time to indulgence and aggrandisement. On their expulsion from the Holy Land the knights first settled in Venice, ready to act as evangelising free-lances wherever their services might be required, and to them Conrad, who was acting as regent for the King

of Poland, then of tender years, applied for assistance against the Prussians—an offer which was readily accepted.

A deputation of seven of the knights proceeded to Poland to receive instructions as to the task which lay before them. They were required, in return for a territorial reward, to complete the subjugation of Prussia, and to compel the perverts of that nation to re-embrace Christianity. The knights carried out their mission in a manner little distinguished from a war of extermination, and Prussia and Eastern Pomerania were quickly overrun. Both the Emperor and Pope Gregory IX. regarded the war which the knights were waging in the light of a crusade, and saw with pleasure the rapid Germanisation of Prussia. The conquering knights were quickly followed by pioneers of commerce, and all along the shores of the Baltic there was a steady advance of German traders. So successful were the efforts of the Teutonic Knights that the grateful Conrad surrendered to them the territory of Culm and all the country between the Vistula, the Mokra and the Druentsa. The cession of so considerable a portion of Polish territory was apparently to be only of a temporary nature, and the knights were eventually to receive merely a portion of such possessions as they might wrest from the Prussian pagans. But to

compel these monkish soldiers to surrender lands once occupied by them was to prove a difficult task, and, on the restoration of the monarchy, the long reign of Vladislas IV. was to prove a continuous struggle with the Teutonic Knights. By that time the knights had Germanised almost the whole of Prussia to the Niemen, and, in 1283, the last Prussian chief had taken refuge in Lithuania, with the fragments of his race. But Poland had now, on its north-eastern borders, a formidable State, half ecclesiastics and half soldiers, who were to act as determined pioneers of Germanisation.

Rumours of the thorough-going evangelisation waged by the Teutonic Knights against their near kinsfolk, the wild Prussians, first woke the inhabitants of Lithuania to a sense of impending danger. They immediately abandoned their loose tribal system of government and, under exceptionally able rulers, extended their dominions mainly at the expense of Russia, which was at the time hard pressed by the Tatars. One of the Lithuanian princes, Mendovg by name, extended his empire from the Niemen and the Bug almost to the Dwina and the Beresina. In 1251 he embraced Christianity and assumed the royal dignity; and Lithuania henceforth became an important factor in Eastern Europe. Indeed, at one time,

it seemed as if this new and aggressive State was about to absorb the nations east and west of her. Poland just then seemed to be dropping to pieces; and, with the possibility of being cut off from the Baltic by the growing power of the Teutonic Knights, there was now the very real danger for Poland that she might be immured between the strong empire of Germany on the west and the young and aggressive kingdom of Lithuania on the east.

Added to this danger were the terrible Tatar invasions (1224–1242), which profoundly influenced the fate of the Slav countries. The Tatars, whom Ghengis Khan had so often led to victory and plunder, after subduing Russia and making it a desert, carried their terrific depredations into more western countries. Poland, torn by internal factions and weakened by the dissensions of rival princes, became an easy prey, and Cracow, the capital of the kingdom, was taken and destroyed. The Polish nobles offered what resistance they could, but it was not till 1241 that the onrush of the invaders was stayed, when Henry the Pious, of the royal house of the Piasts, rallied the fragments of the Polish army and gave battle at Lignica. The duke was killed, and with him fell more than ten thousand of the Polish chivalry. The Tatars carried off many prisoners and much

plunder, and we are told that nine sacks were filled with the ears of the slain. But although the Tatars were nominally victors in the battle, their *élan* was destroyed. The tide of destruction rolled on to Silesia and Moravia or diverged to Hungary, where it quietly subsided; but it left effects behind it which not a century could repair.

The influence of the Tatar invasions upon Poland was far-reaching, and, on the whole, highly beneficial. In the first place the Tatars had dealt roughly with the Teutonic Knights; and although the invaders contented themselves with setting up a kingdom at Kazan, on the Volga, the rise of Russian power was checked, and thus two of Poland's aggressive neighbours had their claws pared. Further, the mission thrust upon the kingdom of acting as the bulwark of Christianity and civilisation towards the savage and unknown east was to endow it with a prestige which increased in the centuries which were yet to come. It cemented, too, the union between the Papacy and Poland, and quickened the Latinising of the Polish people, while it provided the basis for the coming union between Poland and Lithuania, especially as the latter State soon began to feel the civilising influence of its western neighbour. The internal life of the kingdom was also influenced by the wars against the Tatars. Such towns as

existed were without fortifications fit even to resist the unscientific attacks of that day, and the castles of the nobility were similarly undefended. The urgent necessity of defending themselves against the Mongolian invaders turned the attention of the Poles to the construction of ramparts and battlements; and, for this technical work, as well as for repairing the damage done by the barbarian invaders, it was found necessary to call in the assistance of trained foreign craftsmen, particularly Germans and Italians. The work of the latter appears to have given the greater satisfaction, and the impress which Italian architecture left upon the country was to augment the Latin spirit which forms, even to-day, such a remarkable characteristic of Poland.

The dangers to be apprehended by Poland from the Teutonic Knights, the Lithuanians and the Tatars were those associated with war; but, from the west, a peaceful penetration was in progress from across the German frontier fraught with almost equal menace. The movement is first discernible to an appreciable extent during the twelfth century; and it was largely due to discontent within the Empire, which forced the more virile portion of the population to seek their fortune towards the east. The fertility of Poland and the comparative sparsity of its popula-

tion induced the Germanic emigrants to settle within the kingdom, and, by the close of the twelfth century, at a period when Poland was a prey to domestic anarchy, they overflowed Silesia, and, before the succeeding century had closed, Little Poland was, to a great extent, colonised by them. These colonists brought with them the language, customs and industries of Germany, and grouped themselves into rural and urban communities, to which the Polish Government, with impolitic generosity, granted a species of autonomy, permitting the existence of burgomasters, town councils, and all the municipal machinery then to be found within the Empire. From this German colonisation sprang, in part, a class hitherto practically unknown in Poland—a *bourgeoisie*—and this new element was strengthened by the craftsmen brought in, as already mentioned, to repair and guard against the ravages of the Tatars. These skilled artisans, not unnaturally, demanded certain terms from their Polish employers; and, by the privileges granted them, they helped to form an important factor of the State, balancing, to some extent, the influence of the nobles and clergy, and developing into a stratum of society capable of offering a far more stubborn resistance to oppression than the peasants.

But, in spite of the growing power of the

bourgeoisie, the unchecked progress of the aristocratic and clerical elements was the dominant feature of Poland in the thirteenth century. It was the aristocracy which had brought to an end the fratricidal struggle between the sons of Bolesas III., and had placed the youngest brother, Casimir, on the throne in 1177. Three years later, the first national Diet of Poland took place at Lenczyca, and, at this assembly of nobles and clergy, which is regarded as the first attempt at Polish legislation, the former were relieved from some heavy compositions hitherto sanctioned by Canon Law; but, in return, they decreed the abrogation of the testament of Bolesas III., and declared the sovereignty of Poland hereditary in the descendants of the reigning duke. This important enactment was submitted to, and received the assent of, the Holy See; but it seems that it contained some legal defects, for the minor dukes were apparently confirmed in their respective appanages, and the succession vested, by implication, in their descendants. And thus the existence of four or five hereditary and almost independent governments was condoned, even if it was not openly acknowledged.

The growing power of the nobles is well shown by the fact that, apparently without even a protest from the supreme ruler, they took it upon

themselves to arrange the succession to the throne. At the same time, however, Casimir restricted their arbitrary domination to some extent, for one of his first acts was to procure the abolition of an abuse which had inflicted terrible hardships on the poorer portion of the landed proprietors. For centuries there had prevailed a custom by which the monarchs of the country, in journeys of state or ceremony, had been furnished with horses, food, lodging and every other necessity by the inhabitants of the districts through which they passed. This system pressed heavily at times on the peasants and lesser gentry; but it grew to be intolerable when every noble imitated the state of his sovereign, and insisted on the provision of the same supplies, no matter what was the occasion of his journey, and even when engaged in one of the perpetually recurring feuds with rival aristocrats. It needs little imagination to conceive to what condition the poorer and more peaceable inhabitants were reduced by having to house and feed the ruffians and bullies who formed the armies of some of the more belligerent aristocracy. A deeply-rooted feeling of discontent was engendered in the country, and, at the assembly of Lenczyca, Casimir felt himself strong enough to terminate the abuse. The suppression of the obnoxious privilege was solemnly decreed; the

peasants were declared exempt from the claims which had reduced them to wretchedness; and a dreadful anathema was pronounced on those who should disturb the inhabitants of the country in their possessions.

The struggle between the Empire and the Papacy continued with accumulated defeat to the secular power. In 1177 the Emperor was forced to make abject submission to the Holy Father, and the election of Innocent III. was the signal for a more intensive warfare. He claimed, as lord of the world, universal authority, and a later successor, Innocent IV., deposed the Emperor, whose death in 1250 signalised the complete triumph of the Papacy. With Rome putting forward such claims, it is not surprising that the clergy of Europe had become a powerful class. By the middle of the thirteenth century they were, in Poland, the greatest social factor of the age. Religious sentiment, too, was exalted by the frightful calamities which were sweeping over Poland, more particularly the Mongolian invasions, and this fact tended to exalt ecclesiastical pretensions still higher. The power to which the Church in Poland had risen, in the middle of the thirteenth century, is shown by the canonisation of the bishop Stanislas, the victim of Bolesas II.—a reminder to the common people that expiation was

demanded by the Church when sacrilege had been committed, even if the wrongdoer was the monarch of the land. But at this time the corruption of morals appears to have reached a fearful height, and the clergy showed but a poor example to their flocks. Ignorance, luxury and incontinence are said to have been rife among them. Some were openly married, others had concubines, and, in both cases, their offspring were admitted to the rights of inheritance. These abuses reached the ear of Pope Celestine III., who dispatched a legate to apply the canonical remedies. The cardinal acquitted himself well of his task, and the decree of terrible punishments purged the Polish clergy of many of their immoral practices.

In the period of internal anarchy which prevailed from 1139 to the beginning of the fourteenth century, a new Germanic peril was arising to threaten Poland. Almost at the moment when the unfortunate parcelling out of Poland into minor governments had taken place the Northern Mark of Germany fell to Albert the Bear, and that prince made of his dominions a State which, as the electorate of Brandenburg, and later, as the nucleus of the Kingdom of Prussia, was to become one of the most dangerous enemies of Poland. While the sons of Bolesas Wrymouth were engaged in their senseless and unpatriotic

quarrels, Albert the Bear and Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony, were attacking with a methodical ferocity the Slavs of the lower Oder and Elbe. In 1181 the Duke of Stettin entered the German confederation, and, within a short time, the chieftains of Brandenburg had crossed the Oder and set foot on Polish soil. Fortunately for Poland, the Empire, as a whole, was in no position to carry out the Germanisation of its eastern neighbour. The causes which led to the inactivity of Germany at this time were many and complex. The Crusades were occupying the attention of the civilised world, and, in common with the remainder of Europe, the eyes of Germany were turned towards them. Further, the Crusades had a more direct influence on Germany, for the second Crusade, in 1147, was accompanied by other crusades in the north of Germany against the heathen; and the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa himself set forth on the third Crusade of 1190.

While these struggles were affecting history in numberless ways—one of them being the easing of pressure on Poland—the great contest between the Empire and the Papacy never ceased. In this contest the Crusades told heavily in favour of the ecclesiastical power, for the movement had its inspiration in the Popes and not in the Emperors, and the German clergy not

unnaturally lent the weight of their Order to the Holy See. With their attention fixed upon the Crusades, and with their genuinely religious interest in these expeditions, by a curious paradox, undermining their strength in the struggle against Rome, the Emperors were naturally not in a position to carry out any serious aggression against Poland. Other causes which stayed the hand of Germany were the growth of the towns within the Empire, and the bitter struggles between the feudal barons and the throne. The towns were, on the whole, anti-papal in sentiment, and were thus a support to the Emperors in the struggle with Rome; on the other hand, the Holy See found an ally in the feudalism of the Empire, if for no other reason than that the barons were bitterly hostile to the sovereign. The growth of the towns, in which the Emperors were deeply interested, turned the thoughts of the latter to peace, instead of war; while the power and turbulence of the nobles caused aggressive action to be confined within the Empire, instead of directed across its borders. It was fortunate for Poland that, in her days of dismal dismemberment and decay, the strength of her powerful and aggressive neighbour was thus weakened.

During the period now under review, the population of Poland was diluted by the entry of alien

immigrants. The peaceful penetration of the Germans has already been alluded to. These formed, for the most part, burghers of the cities, and early obtained great influence in the country, one of the Polish rulers* being so partial to German fashions that he affected their habits, dressing like a German and wearing his hair after their style. In addition to the Germans, were the Armenians and Jews. The former came for the purposes of trade, and, as early as the thirteenth century, a considerable number had settled in the country; while the Jews, also attracted by the prospect of making money, had begun to filter into Poland from very early times. A great portion of the trade of the country was carried on by them. In all probability the oldest Jewish immigrants reached Poland from the countries on the Lower Danube and from the kingdom of the Khazans, who had embraced the Jewish faith. At the end of the eleventh century, another stream of Jewish immigrants flowed from Germany, and, in 1264, Bolesas V. granted them certain privileges. The Jews, however, never became really assimilated, and to this day, to a great extent, use the German in preference to the Polish tongue.

* Lesko the Black, 1279–1289.

CHAPTER V

FROM THE RESTORATION OF THE MONARCHY TO THE DEATH OF CASIMIR IV

AFTER more than a century of disorder, the death of Lesko the Black, in 1289, plunged the country into a state of anarchy, rare even in Poland. The struggles of the rival candidates for the supreme power, among whom were Wenceslas, King of Bohemia, and Vladislas, the late duke's brother, continued for several years, and the former did not scruple to call in the Lithuanians to his aid. When to these troubles were added new invasions by the Tatars and the Prussians the Polish nobles at last recognised that, unless they could contrive a speedy settlement of their differences, the nation's fate was sealed. They, therefore, united in choosing Prezymislas, the Duke of Great Poland and Pomerania, and this prince resolved that with the authority he would assume also the title of king. Without troubling to obtain the Pope's sanction he received the crown from his nobles and clergy at Gnesna. He seemed likely to prove a strong and successful ruler, but within eight months he was murdered and domestic strife raged again.

After a few years Wenceslas, with the support of the great nobles, obtained the throne of Poland, but his preference for his other kingdom of Bohemia, which he made no effort to conceal, aggravated the discontent of his new subjects, who very soon regretted their choice of one whose ancestors had been among the bitterest enemies of their country. It was not long before he became engaged in wars with the Empire and with Hungary, and these gave to Vladislas the opportunity of renewing his attempt to win the Polish crown. He quickly gained the support of Little Poland and Pomerania; but, even after the death of Wenceslas and the murder of Wenceslas's son, he found himself opposed by the nobles of Great Poland, who had experienced his cruelty in the past, and by the German burghers of Cracow. The prince of Great Poland, however, died four years later, and that province made its submission to Vladislas, who was forthwith proclaimed at Gnesna "King of all Poland," although his coronation, sanctioned by the Pope —the first to take place at Cracow—was delayed until 1320.

The reign of Vladislas, who was known as *Lokietek* or the Dwarf, lasted from 1306 to 1333, and was important in both the foreign and domestic history of his country. Soon after his accession

Pomerania was lost to Poland, and in spite of a struggle which lasted almost continuously until his death, the king failed to recover the province. At the outset, the enemy was Waldemar, Margrave of Brandenburg, who, on being appealed to by a disaffected Pomeranian family, had closely invested the town of Dantzig. Lokietek summoned the Teutonic Knights, whose headquarters had, in 1308, been moved to Marienburg on the Vistula, to relieve the town ; but no sooner had their efforts compelled the Brandenburgers to raise the siege than they attacked the Polish garrison in their turn and captured the city, as well as the whole province, for their Order. The king's expostulations and menaces were alike in vain ; he was kept busy at the time in putting down a revolt of the burghers in Cracow, and could not put his threats into execution. He laid his case, indeed, before the Pope, who appointed a commission of inquiry, as the result of which the Order was excommunicated and condemned to pay a heavy fine. The excommunication was ignored and the indemnity was not paid. But towards the end of his reign, Lokietek found himself strong enough to conduct several expeditions against the knights, in which his Polish troops had the support of auxiliaries from Hungary and Lithuania.

These auxiliaries were available as the result

of alliances which the Polish king had effected by the marriage of his daughter with the king of Hungary, and that of his son Casimir with the daughter of Gedymin, Grand Prince of Lithuania. In the latter case events had for some time been tending in such a direction as would make a *rapprochement* between the two countries likely. Nearly twenty-five years before Conrad's invitation to the Teutonic Knights to undertake the subjugation and conversion of the Prussians, another Order, that of the Sword-bearers, whose vows and constitution closely resembled those of the Templars, had entered upon the task of evangelising Livonia. They united with the Teutonics in 1238, and thereafter were governed by a provincial master deputed by the chapter in Culm. As the power of the knights steadily increased both Lithuania and Poland suffered from their aggressive policy, and, as we have seen, the danger in which it stood furnished Lithuania with the incentive to unite its hitherto independent tribes and to consolidate its forces. The work of Mendovg, who in 1260 asserted his independence of the Livonian Knights, has been referred to above; his success was carried still further in the next century by Gedymin, who not only extended the boundaries of Lithuania far towards the south, but also by his wise rule

greatly improved the internal condition of the country. A Polo-Lithuanian alliance, on the ground of common hostility to the Military Orders, was thus a natural act of policy on both sides, besides being the best protection that Lokietek could find against an attack upon his kingdom by the powerful Duchy on his eastern border, where natural frontiers were lacking.

The war against the knights was waged by Lokietek with the utmost savagery, although, as often happened in such cases, it was the innocent peasants of Pomerania rather than the military monks themselves who suffered most from the excesses of his troops. After two expeditions of this kind, he convened, in 1331, a great assembly—the first Polish Diet to be attended by the smaller as well as the greater nobles—to consider what measures should next be taken. But the treachery of Samatulski, a wealthy and powerful noble whom the king had just replaced by his son Casimir as governor of Great Poland, and who sought to revenge himself by joining his country's enemies, enabled the latter to invade the kingdom instead of merely defending themselves in their Pomeranian fortresses. They penetrated into Great Poland, laid waste the country and even captured the city of Gnesna. The king, however, induced Samatulski to return

to his allegiance, and as a result the knights were heavily defeated. To escape utter destruction they appealed to John, the King of Bohemia, who had already lent them some support, and who himself laid claim, in right of his wife, to the crown of Poland, to make a diversion on the west. John was willing enough, and the consequent hasty departure of Lokietek to raise the siege of Posen gave the knights time to recover, and hostilities continued until the king's death in 1333.

In addition to Pomerania, Silesia was also lost to Poland during this reign. From the time of the Tatar invasions the immigration of German colonists into the province had been encouraged by the Poles themselves, and now John of Bohemia had little difficulty in procuring the recognition of his authority from the princes who, while nominally subordinate to Poland, had contrived, for nearly two centuries, to be practically independent.

If the wars of Vladislas Lokietek were hardly successful, at least his internal rule resulted in a great increase of prosperity and order. By freeing the public roads from the brigands who infested them, and by reorganising the administration of justice, he made possible the rapid development of commerce and the consequent growth, both in population

and importance, of the towns; from his time the burghers began to exert a power in the country which could not be ignored. On the other hand, the arrival of certain heretics* during his reign occasioned the establishment of a mild form of the Inquisition—a fact which deserves a passing notice in the case of a country where religious strife was to play a large part in shaping its later history.

Casimir, known as the Great, succeeded his father on the throne, and during his long reign of thirty-seven years his efforts were continually directed to the task, which Lokietek had begun, of improving the internal condition of his country. It was evident that no permanent development of prosperity was possible so long as Poland continued to be at war with her neighbours, the King of Bohemia and the Teutonic Knights. With the former, therefore, he purchased peace by assenting to the incorporation of Silesia in the Bohemian kingdom—which, as we have seen, his predecessor had been powerless to prevent—in return for the surrender of all claim to the Polish crown by John and his successors. An agreement with the knights was more difficult to arrange, and the terms finally agreed upon were bitterly opposed

* The Dulceans (Communists), and Fratricelli (Anarchists).

by the Polish nobles, and nothing less than his urgent need of tranquillity for the sake of his proposed internal reforms could have induced even their king to consent to them. By a treaty signed in 1343, Pomerania and Culm were ceded to the Teutonic Order, which, on its side, restored other territory to Poland. By this arrangement Poland was cut off from all access to the Baltic.

In another direction, however, Casimir was able to effect his country's expansion. The last independent duke of Red Russia died in 1339, and the eagerness of both Poland and Lithuania to annex it led to a renewal of hostilities between the two states. But the motives which had induced them to form an alliance in the preceding reign were still powerful, and, on the intervention of the King of Hungary, who had married Casimir's sister Elizabeth, the rivals agreed to a partition of the duchy, by which Poland received East Galicia as its share.

As the essential foundation of all improvement in the social condition of his people, Casimir took measures for the establishment of public order and security. The highways were once more made perilous by the activities of brigands, who were in many cases, it is said, disbanded soldiers carrying on their new profession with the connivance of the great nobles, and against them and

their protectors the king prosecuted a vigorous and successful campaign. The natural result was seen in the growth of industry and commerce; German traders and artisans settled in the country in large numbers; handsome public buildings were erected; and towns were built and fortified.

It is, however, on another achievement than these that the fame of Casimir the Great chiefly rests. Before his time the laws of his country were barbarous, depending for their sanction on custom only, and differing widely in the various parts of the kingdom. This state of things was changed by the work of two Diets which fixed and elaborated in two codes the laws of Little and Great Poland respectively, and the two were united into a single code in 1368. The general tendency of its provisions was to improve the status of the peasants; the possession and the rights of property were secured to them; their lords were no longer permitted, as hitherto, to exercise over them the power of life and death; and methods were prescribed by which they might acquire their freedom. The effect of these laws, it is true, was considerably curtailed in the reign of Casimir's successors; but it was no wonder that he himself was called the "Peasants' King." In his reign, too, were enacted several statutes to improve the condition of his Jewish

subjects, in consequence of which the Jews have ever regarded Poland with especial affection. But it was not only the lack of uniformity and the repressive character of the laws which needed redress, but also their corrupt administration ; and the king, therefore, effected also a re-organisation of the courts of justice. Moreover, in 1364, with the object of breaking a link which bound the German settlers to the country of their birth, he abrogated the *Jus Magdeburgicum*, which conceded to them the right of appeal to the German court at Magdeburg.

One other act of Casimir's must be mentioned, inasmuch as it originated a practice which proved disastrous in subsequent reigns. He had no son, and was anxious to secure the succession for his nephew Louis of Hungary, whom he considered strong enough to win back some of the territory that had been ceded to the Teutonic Knights, and to keep in check the power of his turbulent nobles. He therefore, in 1339, proposed him as his successor to a Diet convoked at Cracow. The nobles were not slow to take advantage of the unaccustomed privilege conceded to them ; and, a few years later, they laid certain terms before Louis to which they demanded that he should assent as the price of their support. This was the origin of the *pacta conventa*, always made

henceforth between the nobles and the new king, and framed for their own exclusive benefit and the detriment of king and peasantry. On this occasion, in return for his election, Louis undertook, among other things, to exempt the nobles from taxation and to support their retinues in all military operations beyond the frontier.

When, therefore, he succeeded to the throne of Poland in 1370, he found the monarchical power greatly reduced ; and in order to deal with a situation for which his own previous action was mainly responsible, he endeavoured to win the support of the nobles of Little Poland by special favours. An insurrection by the nobles of Great Poland was the inevitable, though not immediate, result. An additional cause of anger was supplied by his arbitrary incorporation of Red Russia in his Hungarian dominions ; and meanwhile the people soon came to dislike and distrust a ruler who was unable to speak or to understand their language. It was not long before Louis returned to his kingdom of Hungary, handing over to his mother as regent the government of his new subjects. Only once did he visit Poland again in person, and then, in 1374, he proposed to the Diet that the succession should be secured to his eldest daughter Maria, since he had no son. True to the precedent that had been set in Casimir's

reign, the nobles proceeded to make terms; ultimately, in return for further exemption from the performance of State services, they accepted the king's proposal. They did not hesitate, however, when his death took place in 1382, to reopen the question; and the fact that their choice finally rested on his youngest daughter Hedwig was due less to any sense of obligation to fulfil their earlier pledges than to their dissatisfaction with the other candidates.

Hedwig was betrothed to William, Duke of Austria; but the Polish nobles, anxious to renew the alliance with Lithuania which had been practically shattered during the reign of Louis, stipulated that she should marry Jagello, the grandson of Gedymin, and the young queen reluctantly consented. The resulting union of the two peoples under a single ruler is one of the most important events in the history of Poland.

Since the death of Gedymin, the expansion of Lithuania had continued—eastwards at the expense of Muscovy and southwards at the expense of the Tatars; between the Dniester and the Dnieper its southern frontier was now the Black Sea. At the same time, contact with the Ruthenian peoples whom they subdued had brought to bear upon the Lithuanians the influences of civilisation, and the change from paganism to Christianity,

though by no means accomplished as yet, was being steadily carried on. In any attempt to understand the subsequent relations between this state and Poland, it is important to remember that the Christian faith reached it, not through the "fire and sword" methods by which the knights of the north tried to enforce its conversion—methods which had, in fact, the opposite effect of prejudicing the pagans against the Gospel so proclaimed—but through the more peaceful influence which we have just described, with the significant result that Lithuanian Christianity was Orthodox and not Roman. Jagello himself was still pagan at the time when his marriage with Hedwig was arranged, but he consented to be baptised as a Catholic before the ceremony, and afterwards to complete the conversion of his subjects.

Common opposition to the Teutonic Knights had already proved itself an adequate basis for an alliance between Poland and its powerful eastern neighbour, but it hardly sufficed by itself to reconcile the Lithuanians to what they regarded as the loss of their independence; and the union of 1386, though it paved the way for a more stable union in the future, was not itself lasting. In social and political institutions, as well as in religion, the line of cleavage between Poles and

Lithuanians was deeply marked; and the fear of the nobles of the Duchy that their feudal authority would be diminished, backed up by the dread of Catholicism felt by the common people, speedily sowed the seeds of rebellion. The intrigues of the Teutonic Knights worked in the same direction, for they conceived that their only chance of safety from an overwhelming attack lay in the dissolution of the bond which united the two countries. The disaffected elements found a leader in Witowt, a cousin of Jagello's, whose father Jagello had himself caused to be murdered, and who thought he saw the opportunity of raising Lithuania into an independent kingdom with himself as its first king. Jagello, or, to give him the name by which he was crowned king of Poland, Vladislas II., was, however, awake to the danger that impended; and, in order to avert hostilities between the two parts of his dominions, he took the step, in 1401, of surrendering to Witowt his own rights in the Duchy, insisting only that the two states should in future elect their rulers jointly, and follow a common policy in relation to their neighbours. Twelve years later, the ties were drawn closer, and the relations more carefully defined, by the union of Horodlo, which decreed that the legislative and administrative institutions of Poland and Lithuania should be organised on

the same plan, and extended to the nobles in the latter country all the privileges enjoyed by those in the former, on the sole condition of their professing the Catholic form of Christianity. Membership of the Orthodox Church was thus constituted a bar to political privileges, on the ground, no doubt, that it was naturally associated with a leaning towards Muscovy.

Meanwhile, war with the Teutonic Knights had once more broken out in 1391. Actually it was begun by their aggression, but, in any case, it was inevitable sooner or later, for it was the obvious policy of Vladislas to try to recover control of some part of the Baltic seaboard. At first he met with small success; Witowt was engaged in an attempt to subdue the Tatars of the south Russian plains, and was unable to give his cousin much support, while the knights had as their ally Sigismund, King of Hungary, who had never forgiven the Poles for their exclusion of his wife Maria from the throne. In 1399, however, the Tatars inflicted a crushing defeat on Witowt, and, by putting an end to his hopes of Lithuanian expansion to the south-east, convinced him of the necessity of co-operating with Poland. A few years more, and Hungary found itself threatened by the advancing power of the Turks, with the result that Sigismund withdrew from the

war against the Poles and the knights were glad to make terms. By the treaty of Raciaz in 1404 they restored Dobrzyn to Poland, but obtained in return a money indemnity and the surrender of Samogitia.

It was impossible that Jagello should regard such a peace as final, and the war was soon renewed, this time more successfully. In 1410 a combined force of Poles and Lithuanians met the knights in a great battle near Tannenberg and won a decisive victory. But almost immediately Witowt received news of a Tatar invasion of Lithuania, and hurriedly withdrew his troops to oppose it. Deprived of his help, the king was unable, or perhaps too cautious, to take full advantage of his success, and his enemies were allowed time to recover from their defeat. At the beginning of the following year peace was signed at Thorn, and Poland received back Samogitia, as well as an indemnity of 100,000 marks.

The knights continued to be troublesome throughout the remaining years of Jagello's reign, and made more than one attempt to bring about the separation of Lithuania from Poland. Their efforts failed; and after the death of Witowt the intrigues of his successor with the Emperor Sigismund met with no better success in 1432. Two years later Jagello himself died. His reign of

forty-eight years is the longest recorded in Polish history, and throughout it he had striven before all else to consolidate the union of the two Slav peoples. At his death Poland was established as one of the Great Powers of Europe.

The ten years that followed his death were marked by a further development of aristocratic power in Poland, as well as of a tendency towards separation in Lithuania, for his son and successor, Vladislas III., was only nine years old when he came to the throne, and after his minority was over he was continually absent from the country. In 1439 the throne of Hungary became vacant by the death of the Emperor Albert; the young King of Poland was chosen to fill it, and, after many months of dispute and civil strife, his coronation took place. He found his new kingdom engaged in a struggle with the Turks; and, at the age of eighteen, he crossed the Danube and advanced into Bulgaria at the head of a combined force of Poles and Hungarians. So brilliant was his success in this first expedition that the Sultan Amurath II. offered advantageous terms of peace, which were accepted, and a suspension of hostilities for ten years was agreed to. But the Pope absolved Vladislas from his oath, and, in less than five months, he renewed the attack. This time fortune failed him; and on the field of Varna, 1444, his

forces were almost annihilated and he himself was killed. His death, bitterly deplored by his subjects, was the occasion for Poland and Lithuania to be once more united under a single ruler, for the Poles offered the crown to Casimir, the younger brother of the late king, who had been for four years the practically independent grand duke of the latter state. His nobles were opposed to his accepting the offer, and he was himself unwilling to exchange the despotic authority which he wielded already for that of a king hampered and thwarted by the power of turbulent nobles. For more than two years the interregnum continued; and when at length he agreed to his election, he still firmly refused to confirm the *pacta conventa*, until, seven years later, he yielded to the urgency of his military necessities, combined, as they were, with the danger of deposition.

From the outset of his reign, Casimir resolved that the maintenance of the union between the two states should be the paramount aim of his policy, and he always steadily refused to allow the government of his old subjects to pass into any other hands than his own. In consequence he was regarded by the Poles as unduly favourable to Lithuanian interests, and most of the troubles with his nobles arose from the mistrust which this opinion engendered. Their shortsighted provin-

cialism, too, prevented their sharing his conviction of the importance of crushing the power of the Teutonic Knights, and caused the struggle against these ancient foes to be needlessly prolonged through a dozen years.

Since their defeat at Tannenberg in 1410, the Teutonic Order had become more corrupt and tyranical than ever. As early as 1397 some of its subjects had formed a league to oppose it, called, from their emblem, the Lizardites; and, during the reign of Vladislas III., a further step had been taken by the formation of a new league in which all the nobles and townsmen of the Prussian provinces took part. This "Prussian League" found itself at last compelled to appeal to the King of Poland for protection; and, in 1454, at their invitation, Casimir proclaimed the incorporation of the provinces in his kingdom, and war began.

In order to obtain men and money, the king had to apply to each of the five local Diets, and, in every instance, the occasion was utilised as a means of exacting from him the confirmation of ancient privileges as well as the granting of new ones. His pledges were afterwards embodied in the Statute of Nieszawa, 1454, which made the consent of the *szlachta* or lesser nobles necessary before new laws could be enacted or war declared. The opening of the war was disastrous, and Casimir was forced to purchase the help of Bohemian

mercenary troops—a proceeding, however, which could not be executed without fresh conflicts with the Diets over the raising of funds. After a protracted struggle and an abortive conference in 1463, exhaustion at length drove the knights to agree to the second Treaty of Thorn (1466), by which the western provinces of Prussia, including Dantzig and other important towns, were restored to Poland, while eastern Prussia was to be held by the Teutonic Order as a fief of the crown.

Poland thus recovered access to the Baltic, and with it the opportunity of acquiring a maritime trade. Her rich arable lands had never yet been fully developed, but from this time more attention was given to agriculture, and wheat began to be exported to the western European states. The result appeared, socially, in the further oppression of the peasants, and laws were passed to bind them more closely to their masters. Casimir the Great had allowed a peasant to leave his lord on the ground of ill-treatment, but now even this humane law was repealed, and the harbouring of a fugitive serf was constituted a serious offence.

The war with the Teutonic Knights was not the only one which disturbed Casimir's reign. A disputed succession to the throne of Bohemia involved him in a struggle with Hungary which lasted, with intervals, for eight years; and the King of Hungary was ever after his implacable foe,

ready at all times to give encouragement and help to Poland's enemies. More important, though of shorter duration, was the war against the Turks, who had captured Constantinople in 1453, and were becoming more and more dangerous to their European neighbours. In 1484 Poland came within the scope of their activities; for their seizure of two strongholds in Moldavia, situated at the mouths of the Danube and the Dniester, threatened to interfere with its trade passing down those rivers. For nearly a century the kings of Poland had been recognised—somewhat vaguely—as suzerains over Moldavia, and Casimir was successful in getting this relation reaffirmed; but otherwise the operations led to no decisive result. Lastly, the growing power of Muscovy was seeking to expand at the cost of Lithuania, and was thus an additional source of trouble.

Casimir died in 1492. His character has been variously estimated by historians, but his reign was one of the most important in the history of Poland. It was certainly due to his clear-sighted judgment, his courage and his patience that the union with Lithuania was so closely maintained during the forty-five years of his reign—a union on which the strength and greatness of the kingdom wholly depended.

CHAPTER VI

POLAND UNDER THE LATER JAGELLONIC KINGS

THE two states, whose union it had been the first object of Casimir IV. to maintain and strengthen, fell apart at his death. Lithuania quickly elected his son Alexander as its Grand Duke, while the choice of Poland fell upon his elder brother, John Albert. The late king's eldest son, Vladislas, was already in possession of the crowns of Bohemia and Hungary.

John Albert had already won a high reputation as a soldier during his father's lifetime, having gained a brilliant victory over the Tatars in 1487, when they invaded Lithuania. On ascending the throne, he determined to renew Casimir's attempt to dislodge the Turks from their fortresses on the Moldavian Black Sea coast; for this purpose he needed money, and, as usual, he found himself obliged to bargain with his nobles before it could be obtained. It was in this connexion that he introduced a notable reform in constitutional procedure; to avoid the necessity of making separate applications to each of the local Diets, he revived the general Diet of the nation, and,

at its first assembly, he signed a new agreement with his nobles as the condition of obtaining a subsidy. The amount granted, however, was quite inadequate for his purpose, and the application had to be repeated—and the concessions extended—three years later. As the result of these two Diets the *szlachta* obtained exemption from all taxes levied on foreign trade; at the same time, it was forbidden to the burghers to hold land outside the towns, and the small amount of liberty which the peasants had retained was still further diminished.

The expedition into Moldavia proved disastrous, but that this was due in some way to the disloyalty of some of the nobles is suggested by the fact that the king, after his return, confiscated the estates of many of them, and had the support of his people in doing so. Further, a Diet held in 1501, just before his sudden death, put back into his hands the control of the military forces of the country.

Meanwhile, his brother Alexander had come into conflict with the growing power of Muscovy which, under Ivan III., had already incorporated the territory of Great Novgorod and was now seeking expansion at the cost of Lithuania. Two wars occurred within a few years, as a result of which the Grand Duchy lost a number of towns and districts on the north-east border. When,

therefore, in 1501, Alexander succeeded his brother on the throne of Poland, his subjects had discovered afresh that isolation meant weakness, and were ready to agree that their Grand Duke and the King of Poland should always in future be one and the same person.

Within a short reign of five years, Alexander's efforts to obtain funds from his nobles resulted in the concession of a great number of new privileges. One of these exempted members of the Senate from prosecution in the royal courts; another restricted the king's rights in regard to the distribution of offices; a third took away from him the control of the mint, and so on. It was also during this reign that the principle was definitely accepted that unanimity, and not merely the vote of a majority, was requisite for all enactments by the Diet. There was thus established the right of veto, by which, at a later stage in Polish history, all attempts at legislation were reduced to impotence.

In 1506 a flying army of Tatars suddenly burst into Lithuania and ravaged far and wide. A small force was, with difficulty, collected to oppose them, and a brilliant victory was gained at Kleck by Michael Glinski, the Tatar host being almost wiped out. When the news of this unexpected success was brought to the king, he lay

on his death-bed, and within a few hours he expired. By his last will he bequeathed the crown to his youngest brother, Sigismund.

Both Lithuania and Poland made haste to confirm the dead king's choice, and Sigismund was crowned at Cracow in January, 1507; he was the fourth of the six sons of Casimir IV. to attain to royal dignity. He had already proved himself a capable governor; for his brother, Vladislas, the King of Bohemia, had committed to him the task, which he had successfully accomplished, of pacifying and reorganising the troublesome province of Silesia. His first work, after his accession, was to introduce order into Polish finances; and in a short time he had reformed the currency, paid Alexander's debts, and was even able to hire mercenary troops with the profits of the mint.

But internal reform, however urgently necessary, could not long absorb his attention. Michael Glinski, the victor of Kleck, had been allowed by Alexander to acquire possession of half the territory of Lithuania, and the new king rightly felt that the maintenance of the royal authority in the Grand Duchy depended upon the reduction of his vassal's swollen power. A quarrel soon occurred, which resulted in Glinski's transferring his allegiance to the Muscovite Tsar, Vasily III., whom he incited to a struggle with Sigismund

which lasted, at intervals, until 1522. The town of Smolensk, whose position on the Dnieper was of great strategic value, was three times besieged by Vasily and at last captured. Shortly afterwards, however, his troops sustained a very heavy defeat at Orsza (1514). Negotiations were opened, but they failed owing to the extravagant demand of the Tsar that all the old Russian lands in Lithuania should be incorporated in his dominions. At length both sides were driven by exhaustion to accept a five years' truce—a truce which was renewed more than once, though the impossibility of agreeing over the possession of Smolensk kept the two Powers from establishing a permanent peace.

During the earlier years of the struggle Glinski was active in his efforts to cripple the resistance of Poland by stirring up the hostility of the Emperor Maximilian and the Teutonic Knights. The Grand Master of the Order, Frederic of Saxony, had, for some time, been attempting to throw off his allegiance to the King of Poland on the ground that he was a prince of the Empire, and he had even put forward a claim to Pomerania, which the knights had lost by the second Treaty of Thorn. His pretensions had the support of the Emperor, who suspected Sigismund of designs upon the throne of Hungary; but the Polish king was able to convince Maximilian of his innocence in this respect,

and a reconciliation was effected which left the knights to shift for themselves. The accession of the Emperor Charles V. at the death of Maximilian in 1519 encouraged the new Grand Master, Albert of Brandenburg, to a fresh assertion of independence, and at the same time Vasily sent him from Muscovy sufficient money to equip 10,000 mercenaries. He therefore declared war against his uncle, the King of Poland, and at first was successful in capturing several fortresses. But, for once, the Polish Diet gave the king its open-handed support; the knights were driven back across the Vistula and reduced to the necessity of asking for terms. During the truce which followed an important change was effected in the position of the Order. Albert and most of his knights embraced the Lutheran faith in 1522, and the Grand Master declared his territory to be henceforth a hereditary duchy; Sigismund consented to the "secularisation," and at Cracow, in 1525, received the homage of Albert as the first Duke of Prussia.

While the danger from Muscovite and Prussian hostility was being overcome a new peril was growing up in the south-east. The gradual extension of their authority over Moldavia brought the Turks up to the frontier of Poland, and laid the kingdom open at any moment to a sudden attack. That the danger was no imaginary one

was proved in 1530—four years after the disastrous defeat of Hungary by the Sultan's troops at the battle of Mohacs—when a combined force of Turks and Moldavians entered Polish territory. The king hastily despatched against them his greatest general, Stanislas Tarnowski, and the invaders sustained a crushing defeat at Obertyn. Sigismund, however, would not permit Tarnowski to cross the border into Moldavia; and the refusal was typical of the unaggressive attitude which characterised all his relations with the Ottoman Power.

Another difficult problem presented itself further east, where the "Ukraine," or border territory, lay open to the raids of the Tatars. The Ukraine had gradually been colonised by the Cossacks, the earliest of whom were deserters from the armies which Poland maintained on the lower Dniester. These were joined by outlaws from many quarters —the runaway serf, the noble who had fallen under the royal displeasure, the Greek schismatic, and the persecuted Lutheran. It was during the reign of Sigismund that some degree of military organisation and discipline was introduced into this motley horde by Ostafi Daskiewicz, who, though originally, it is said, a peasant, was entrusted by the king with the task of defending the marches. He proposed the construction of a line of fortresses, like

the one at Bar, which had been recently built by the queen to protect her Ukranian estates, and had already given ample demonstration of its usefulness. But the Diet refused to grant funds for this excellent purpose, and, in spite of the king's personal approval, its execution was impossible.

The efforts of the *szlachta* to obtain concessions were continued throughout this reign, and aimed, for the most part, at reducing the privileges of the great nobles on the one hand, or restricting the rights of the burghers and peasants on the other. The king upheld the former endeavour, and, in 1527, an end was put to exemption from military service, from which some of the greater nobles had profited. In the previous year the duchy of Massovia, with Warsaw as its capital, was united with the kingdom on the extinction of its ruling house, and the addition of the poor Massovian gentlemen to the Polish Diet strengthened its opposition to the magnates. In their attempt to cripple the power of the towns, however, the Diets found in the king their determined opponent; and, when it persisted, he at last, in 1539, issued an edict by which any noble who tried to encroach upon the rights of the burghers was liable to prosecution for *lèse-majesté*.

Sigismund was popular among his Lithuanian subjects, and sternly maintained the equal treat-

ment of Orthodox and Catholic Christians in legal disputes. He published, in 1529, the first code of Lithuanian laws, which, by its assimilation to the Polish code, strengthened the union of the two countries. He was interested in architecture and in music; and, like his accomplished but selfish and unpopular queen, he encouraged the introduction of Italian culture into his kingdom. His opposition to the Reformation was due not so much to religious bigotry as to hostility to the political opinions which were often found to follow in its wake; and the edicts which were passed against the heretics were largely inoperative because the nobles, jealous of the Church's privileges and pretension, were unwilling to countenance any extension of its powers. On the whole, the condition of Poland when Sigismund died in 1548 was one of such prosperity as had not been previously known—a condition which offers the best proof of the success of his administration.

His son, Sigismund Augustus, had long been recognised as his successor, and was at once crowned at Cracow. His early training had led the Polish nobles to regard him as of an effeminate and pliant character, and they had expected that, at his accession, they would escape from the firm and vigorous control which they had experienced under Sigismund I., a control not at all to their

taste. But the first act of the new king showed them that they had miscalculated. Immediately after his coronation he announced—what he had hitherto kept secret—his marriage with Barbara Radziwill, the daughter of a powerful Lithuanian noble who was the leader of the Reformation movement in the Grand Duchy. Not only her Calvinistic faith, but also the contempt which the *szlachta* felt for the more backward Lithuanians made them bitterly oppose the marriage, and they furiously demanded of the king that he should disown his wife and contract a new alliance more in keeping with the dignity of his kingdom. He refused, and with such firmness that his attitude eventually won the approval of the whole nation. None the less, the marriage made it more difficult for him to deal with the "Dissidents," as all non-Catholics were called in Poland.* The religious problem was now one of the most pressing in the internal affairs of the country, for the new opinions had spread rapidly. He well knew, however, that the zeal of his nobles for the Catholic religion was a less powerful motive with them than their jealousy of the privileged position which the Church had gained; moreover, their eyes were gradually being opened to the lax morals which disgraced many of its highest digni-

* The name was restricted later to Protestants.

taries, as well as to its neglect of education and other public services. With a clear notion, probably, of what would follow from his action he began by announcing his determination to uphold Catholicism as the religion of the kingdom and to enforce the laws against heretics. The episcopal persecution of the Dissidents which immediately followed roused the apprehensions of the nobles, and the Church was so bitterly attacked in the Diets that the bishops were willing to agree to the king's proposal that, while their tithes should still be paid, the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts should remain in abeyance for a year. This suspension of their powers was constantly repeated as the reforming party in the Diet became stronger; and at length, in 1562, when the king was under the necessity of conciliating the nobles in order to obtain funds for his war in Livonia, he conceded the practical abolition of the Church courts altogether.

Freed from the stimulus to mutual support which persecution would have supplied, the various parties of reformers fell to acrid disputes among themselves, and this, as well as the fact that the Catholic leaders were successful in purging their Church of many of its most flagrant abuses, contributed to bring about a reaction towards the older faith during the later years of Sigismund II.

But the king was careful to extend his favour to all his subjects, irrespective of their particular creed; and thus, by his wise action, he preserved domestic peace at a time when religious wars were devastating so many of the countries of Europe.

In his foreign policy Sigismund Augustus was equally successful. When the lands of the Teutonic Order were secularised in 1522, the Livonian Knights of the Sword had preserved their old constitution; and their territory, valuable on account of the Lithuanian and Muscovite trade which passed through it, was now eagerly desired by Sweden, Muscovy and Poland, each of whom aspired to the command of the Baltic. A quarrel between Sigismund's cousin, the Archbishop of Riga,* and the Grand Master von Fürstenburg gave the Polish king the chance of intervention in 1556. He sent a powerful army into South Livonia, compelled the reconciliation of the disputants, and ended by establishing an alliance between Poland and the Order. The Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, naturally disapproved of this advance on the part of Poland; moreover, the alliance was plainly directed against himself. He therefore, in 1558, invaded Livonia, whereupon von Fürstenburg fled to Poland, and the new Grand Master, von Kettler,

* Albert of Brandenburg and the Archbishop were both sons of Sophia, sister of Sigismund I.

lost no time in ceding to the king, as Grand Duke of Lithuania,* the provinces of Courland and Semigallia, in return for protection from the Tsar. In the war which occupied the next few years the Muscovites were defeated in the field, but they retained the Palatinate of Polotsk; Livonia, on the other hand, was incorporated in the kingdom of Poland, von Kettler taking the title, to be hereditary in his family, of Duke of Courland. Poland thus obtained the opportunity to develop as a naval power. Meanwhile, the Swedes had invaded Esthonia, and added that province to their own kingdom.

The struggle had once more drawn Lithuania and Poland together, and it was possible for the king to initiate the discussion of a more effective union between the two countries. At first there was no lack of opposition; but finally, at the Diet of Lublin (1569), in which delegates from Lithuania took part, it was enacted that henceforth the two should form one single and indivisible state, with the same king, Diet, laws and currency; and Warsaw, in the recently incorporated province of Massovia, was chosen as the seat of the Diet.†

* The Poles refused at first to be involved in the affair, regarding it as the concern of Lithuania only.

† It became the capital of Poland in the reign of Sigismund III.

Thus at last was accomplished the task to which so many of the kings of Poland had set their hand.

At the death of Sigismund II., in 1572, the direct line of the Jagellos ended, although the Vasas, who, after the reign of Stephen Batory, occupied the throne for eighty-one years, were the descendants of his sister, Catherine, Queen of Sweden. For nearly two centuries the kings of this great dynasty had guided the fortunes of the state, and under their firm and wise rule Poland had become great among the nations of Europe. Henceforward, until the disasters which extinguished its national life, the history of Poland is one of decline.

CHAPTER VII

THE MONARCHY ELECTIVE

THE crown of Poland had always been elective in theory, and from henceforth it was so in fact; Sigismund II. left no heir, and even the position of Grand Duke of Lithuania had been deprived of its hereditary character by the Treaty of Lublin. This new situation made it necessary to fix new methods of procedure, and, after considerable discussion, it was decided that all the members of the *szlachta* were entitled to vote at the election of a sovereign. The novel spectacle of 40,000 voters, all armed, and many of them with large retinues, meeting on a plain near Warsaw to choose a king, was to become unhappily familiar during the remaining years of Polish history.

In spite of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572, the news of which disquieted the Dissidents, it was agreed to offer the crown to Henry of Valois, brother and heir of Charles IX. of France. Consequently the conditions which had already been drawn up for the new king's subscription, became known as the Henrician

Articles. They provided for the regular meeting of the Diet, and the appointment of a permanent council to advise the king, safeguarded liberty of conscience, declared the consent of the Diet to be necessary for the declaration of war and the levying of taxes, disqualified foreigners from holding public offices, forbade the king to interfere in the election of his successor, and placed his marriage and divorce within the scope of the Diet's control. These articles, together with other conditions embodied in the *pacta conventa*, were accepted by Henry, who was crowned in 1574. His position, however, speedily became intolerable to him ; and four months later, on the death of his brother the King of France, he fled from Poland and never returned.

During the interegnum which followed, a Tatar raid, which wrought great havoc in the eastern provinces, impressed upon the Poles the need for a strong man at the head of the State. The magnates favoured the Emperor Maximilian, but the anti-German feeling of the smaller nobles eventually prevailed, and the throne was secured for Stephen Batory, Prince of Transylvania, already known as one of the great soldiers of his time. His brilliant reign of ten years was to prove him no less a statesman than a soldier ; and, while it lasted, the progress was checked of those forces

and factions within the State which ultimately dragged it to its ruin. At the outset the Prussian provinces were inclined to repudiate his authority, and the citizens of Dantzig broke out into open rebellion. But Stephen's prompt and vigorous measures compelled the town to surrender, and so set him free to turn his attention to the larger issues of foreign politics.

By concluding a truce with the Sultan at the end of 1577, which diminished the danger from the south-east, and by effecting a reconciliation with the new Emperor Rudolf, he made it possible for his country to concentrate its efforts on the struggle with Muscovy. Ivan the Terrible had taken advantage of the recent interregnum in Poland to invade Livonia as well as Esthonia, in pursuance of his constant policy of pressing towards the Baltic ; and Stephen, unlike the Polish nobles, was clear-sighted enough to recognise that the future of Poland as a commercial and naval power was hanging in the balance, for already the advance of Turkish influence in Moldavia had cut off its access to the Black Sea. Like his predecessors, however, he found great difficulty in obtaining funds ; in spite of the strenuous support of his chancellor Zamoyski he could wring out of the Diet only a small and quite inadequate grant. But he had at his disposal

some troops which he had brought from Transylvania, and in 1579 he felt strong enough to demand from Ivan the evacuation of Livonia. He invaded the Tsar's territory and fought a successful campaign, Polotsk and other towns being captured. In the following year the operations were continued, with like success. As each winter approached negotiations were opened, but Ivan's unwillingness to give up Livonia prevented an agreement. At length he gave way, and by the Treaty of Zapolsk, signed in January 1582, Poland gained not only the whole of Livonia, but Polotsk and Wielicz as well, while the other conquests which Stephen had made in Muscovy were restored to the Tsar.

The nobles had given the king but little support in the war; and when he returned in triumph from the defeat of their hereditary foes they gave him as little thanks. No voice but Zamoyski's was raised in the Diet to express their sense of the value of his services. The Polish nobles, indeed, unlike the Lithuanians—who had welcomed the conquerer enthusiastically—had no use for a strong king; royal weakness they considered to be the best guarantee of their prerogatives. Events soon proved the opinion well-founded. Samuel Zborowski, a member of one of the most powerful families in Poland and the

most bitterly opposed to the king, had been outlawed in Henry's reign for a murder committed almost in the royal presence. He now returned to Cracow, whereupon he was arrested, tried, condemned, and executed. His family called out for vengeance, and attempted by violence to win the support of the Diet. But Stephen and his chancellor were equal to the emergency; they opposed the forces of authority to those of rebellion; and the Diet not only confirmed the justice of Samuel's sentence, but decreed also the banishment of Christopher Zborowski, his relative and accomplice.

For the defence of the Ukraine against the inroads of the Tatars Stephen carried out the plan, which had been suggested in the reign of Sigismund I., of organising the Cossacks into regiments as part of the Polish army. Reforms in the system of judicial procedure and in education gave further proof of his interest in his people's welfare. He foresaw the evils which an elective monarchy would infallibly bring upon the country, and, shortly before his death, he tried, without success, to induce the Diet to make the crown hereditary. He died suddenly in 1586, and at once there were let loose all those forces of anarchy which his strong hand had kept in check.

The Zborowski contrived to banish from the

country all the relations of King Stephen, and proposed to confer the crown on the Austrian Archduke Maximilian. The anti-German party, headed by Zamoyski, supported Sigismund Vasa, the heir to the throne of Sweden, who was of Jagellonic descent through his mother Catherine, the daughter of Sigismund I. The Lithuanians, partly from religious motives, partly from jealousy of Polish interference, wished to elect the Tsar Feodor. After discussions, which lasted for several weeks and nearly led to pitched battles between the rival factions, both Sigismund and Maximilian were declared elected by their respective supporters. A civil war ensued, in which Zamoyski defeated the Austrian forces at Cracow, and again in the following year at Byczyna. The throne was thus at last secured for Sigismund.

It soon appeared that the new king did not by any means see eye to eye with his chancellor. He considered that an alliance with Austria offered the best protection against Turkish aggression, and in 1592, with the approval of Zamoyski's opponents in the Diet, he married the Austrian Archduchess Anne. Zamoyski was driven into opposition, but a reconciliation took place and endured for ten years, until the king's marriage with the sister of his first wife (who had died in 1599) incensed the chancellor afresh. This stormy

beginning was the prelude to a whole series of disputes between Sigismund and his nobles; indeed, when he tried in 1606 to introduce into the Diet the constitutional reform of decision by majority, and so to abolish the privilege of veto which was making legislation almost impossible, their resistance developed into a rebellion which had to be put down by force of arms. Before the end of the reign, they had made several steps forward in pursuance of their constant aim to exalt their own power and to reduce the sovereign to a state of helplessness.

The death of his father John III., in 1592, summoned Sigismund to Sweden. His religious bigotry soon alienated his northern subjects, and seven years later he was deposed, his uncle, Charles Vasa, who had acted for him as regent, ascending the throne as Charles IX. The resulting war, begun in Sweden, was continued in Livonia, where the brilliant achievements of Zamoyski and his successor Chodkiewicz, shattered the Swedish forces. But it invariably happened, at the most critical moments, that the Polish Diet withheld the money needed for pressing the war to a conclusion; and Livonia continued to be a battle-ground between the two nations throughout Sigismund's reign, until by the Treaty of Altmark (1629), after the invasion of Prussia by Gustavus

Adolphus, Charles' famous son, the Poles ceded to Sweden not only Livonia but a large part of the Prussian coast as well.

The urgency of the Muscovite peril had ceased for Poland at the death of Ivan IV. in 1584. But when Sweden intervened in the extraordinary contest occasioned by the Russian pretender, the false Demetrius, it was necessary for Poland to follow suit. A series of brilliant actions fought by Zolkiewski brought the Polish forces up to, and even within, Moscow, and Sigismund's son Vladislas was proclaimed Tsar. But Orthodox dislike for a Catholic ruler, combined with the customary refusal of the Polish Diet to vote supplies, soon compelled Zolkiewski to retreat, and after the war had dragged on for some years peace was at last signed at Deulino (1617). By this treaty Poland gained a large part of the central province of Muscovy, with Smolensk and other important fortresses.

In another direction the parsimony of the Diet was responsible for a grave disaster. The piratical habits of the Cossacks goaded the Turks into war in 1618, and Zolkiewski took the field against them. But his supports failed to arrive, many of his troops mutinied, and, after a heroic resistance, the slender force that remained loyal was cut to pieces, Zolkiewski's head being sent

as a present to the Sultan at Stambul. After this initial catastrophe the Diet became more liberal, and the war was carried on with such success that the Turks were glad to accept a truce, which was maintained through many years.

The small success which Poland attained in its foreign enterprises during this long reign, despite the fact that its armies were led by a succession of brilliant soldiers, was due, not to the king, in regard to either his policy or his personal courage, but, as usual, to the narrow interests and short-sighted selfishness of the nobles, and to the same causes must be attributed the ever-increasing misery of the common people. Sigismund, so unlike the Poles in his cultured tastes and his quiet reserve, never gained the affection of his subjects. Towards the end of his life he became hopeless of counteracting the stupidity of the Diet, and gave up the attempt. He died in 1632, and was succeeded by his son Vladislas, whose military successes had already won for him a wide popularity.

The interregnum, although short and undisturbed by the customary scenes of violence, gave the Tsar the opportunity of renewing hostilities with Poland, and of capturing many of the border fortresses. Vladislas, at his accession, was still inspired by dreams of winning back his lost

Muscovite crown, and at once took the field against him. But before his election he had granted to the *szlachta* exemption from payment of land tax; and since the clergy, who paid no taxes, owned three-fourths of all the villages, and almost all the rest of the land was in the hands of the nobles, this meant a very serious diminution of the State revenue. Faced now by the Diet's refusal to grant any funds whatever for the war with Muscovy, Vladislas pawned his crown for 50,000 gulden, and sold to the Elector of Brandenburg exemption from the duty of doing homage for his Prussian lands for 90,000 more. With the troops so obtained, he marched to the relief of Smolensk, and defeated the Tsar's forces outside its walls. Peace was concluded in 1634, by which Vladislas gave up his claim to the throne of Muscovy, while the Tsar, besides restoring the captured places and paying a war indemnity, surrendered his rights to Livonia, Esthonia and Courland. Almost at the same time an agreement was arrived at with the Turks, who had threatened to be troublesome, the Poles undertaking to control the aggressive habits of the Cossacks, and the Turks to instal a more friendly government in Moldavia.

The king was anxious to make an effort to recover those parts of Prussia which had been

lost to Gustavus Adolphus in the preceding reign. On this occasion the refusal of the Diet to support his plans proved fortunate, for a little later he obtained what he wanted without the trouble of fighting for it. The Thirty Years' War was raging, and an alliance with Poland was eagerly sought by England, France and Holland; unable to obtain it, they purchased the neutrality of the Poles by inducing Sweden to surrender all the Prussian conquests and to promise to restore Livonia as soon as the war should end.

With a view to breaking the power of the *szlachta*, which blocked the way to every course, domestic or foreign, making for the welfare of the State, Vladislas founded the Order of the Immaculate Conception, consisting of those younger nobles who were prepared to give their support. But the plan united against him not only the rest of the Polish nobility, who saw their position threatened, but also the Protestant Prussians and the Orthodox Lithuanians, who objected to this further concentration of power in Roman Catholic hands. (The Jesuits had already been installed by Sigismund Augustus, and greatly encouraged by Stephen Batory. By their control of educational institutions they had gained enormous influence.) The king was compelled to dissolve the new Order, and henceforth he looked to the Cossacks of the

Ukraine as the instrument for recovering the royal authority.

The Cossacks liked Vladislas, and would willingly have supported him against the Diet, for by this time many Polish nobles had acquired estates in the Ukraine, and were trying to introduce the conditions of serfdom which they had found so profitable elsewhere. But the war against the Turks, which the king was scheming to bring about—a war which, by furnishing him with the pretext for bringing Cossack troops into Poland, would have enabled him also to strike the intended blow at the *szlachta*—did not break out ; and at length, driven by grievances for which they could obtain no redress, the Cossacks invaded Poland on their own account. At this critical juncture, Vladislas died suddenly in 1648.

Some years before, a small landowner among the Cossacks named Bogdan Chmielnicki had suffered barbarous ill-treatment from a neighing Polish noble ; and, when all his efforts to obtain justice failed, he became the leader of Cossack discontent. It was he who now, at the head of a vast horde of Cossacks and Tatars, marched into Poland. The small force of 4,000 men with which Potocki hastily tried to bar his way was annihilated, and, a week later, another and larger army met almost the same fate. This

was the signal for a general rising by the Ukranian peasants against their Polish masters, which was accompanied by the most horrible atrocities. The *szlachta* were roused at last, and a great host of nearly a quarter of a million men was collected to crush the invaders. The armies met at Pilyawa, and once more the victory of the Cossacks was decisive.

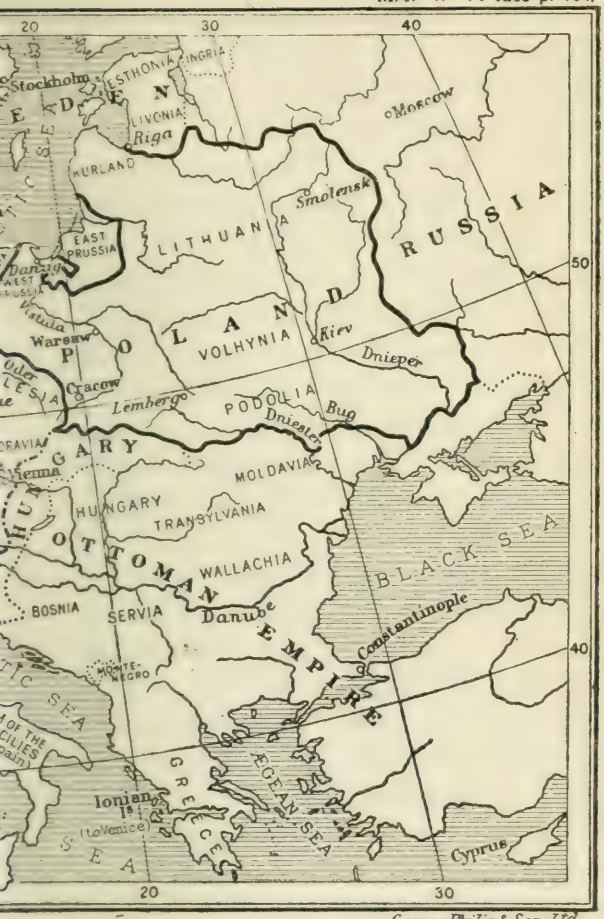
The throne of Poland was still empty, but this last disaster convinced the nobles that the election of a new king must no longer be delayed, and their choice fell upon Vladislas's half-brother, John Casimir, who had recently resigned his ecclesiastical dignity of cardinal. After his accession negotiations were opened with the Cossacks, but Chmielnicki rejected the terms that were offered, and the king himself took the field. His troops numbered no more than 10,000, for the Diet had resumed its parsimonious habits; but, largely through his own courage, the Poles were at length victorious, and peace was arranged by the Treaty of Zborow (1649). It did not last long, however; within two years hostilities had recommenced; and in 1654 Bogdan transferred his allegiance to the Tsar, who had already decided upon war with Poland, and was only too glad of an excuse for action. Within a few months Muscovite troops captured a considerable number of

towns and fortresses in Lithuania; and though they then met with a serious reverse in the field, the check was only temporary, for by the following summer the Poles had no thought for anything but a much greater danger which suddenly burst upon them from the north.

In Sweden the abdication of Queen Christina in 1654 had brought Charles X. to the throne. The King of Poland laid claim to it, as being himself a Vasa, and refused to acknowledge the new sovereign who was only distantly connected with the royal house. This was the pretext, but no more than the pretext, for Charles to invade Poland in 1655; in reality, he was actuated by the desire to recover the Baltic provinces of Prussia, won by Gustavus Adolphus twenty-five years before and afterwards lost. Crippled by the struggle against the Cossacks, Poland could offer Charles but the feeblest resistance; the treachery of many of the nobles added to the desperateness of the situation, and in an astonishingly short time the whole kingdom lay at the conqueror's feet. Warsaw and even Cracow were captured, and John Casimir was a fugitive in Silesia. The Muscovites simultaneously made themselves masters of the greater part of Lithuania. Then the tide suddenly turned. Quarrels broke out between Charles and the Tsar; the

EUROPE
circa 1650
Statute Miles
0 100 200 300
20
10
0
10
50
40
SCOTLAND
Edinburgh
NORTH SEA
IRELAND
Dublin
WALES
ENGLAND
London
Amsterdam
Brussels
SPAN. NETHERLANDS
Mons
Elbe
HOLSTEIN
MECKLENBG
HANOVER
Berlin
HESSE
SAXON STATES
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Seine
Paris
Loire
FRANCE
Bordeaux
LORRAINE
Danube
BAVARIA
SWITZERLAND
TYROL
DUCHY OF SAVOY
Milan (Sp.)
Venice
Parma
Modena
Florence
Genoa
LUCCA
TUSCANY
Rhone
LANGUEDOC
NAVARRE
ROUSSILLON
CATALONIA
Ebro
Corsica (to Genoa)
Rome
Sardinia (to Spain)
Balearic Is
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
Lisbon
Tagus
Madrid
Cadiz
MEDITERRANEAN

MAP 1. To face p. 104.



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Emperor's apprehensions were aroused by the success of the ally of France, and Austrian troops were placed at John Casimir's disposal ; and finally, the example of the heroic defence of the monastery of Czenstochowa by its prior, Kordecki, no less than the haughty behaviour of Charles and his generals, stirred the Poles to a recovery of their national spirit. When the king returned from his exile in Silesia, his people flocked to join him, and thenceforward the defeat of the Swedes was steadily, if slowly, accomplished. At length a declaration of war by the Danes increased their difficulties, while the withdrawal of their ally Frederick William, the Great Elector of Brandenburg, was effected by Poland by the grant of Prussian independence—a notable result of the struggle. By 1660 Charles was ready to agree to the Peace of Oliva, whereby Sweden once more restored to Poland all conquests outside Livonia, while John Casimir renounced his claim to the Swedish crown.

Then the Poles turned once more to face the Tsar, and within two years they succeeded in clearing a large part of Lithuania of the enemy. Both sides were now exhausted, and conferences were held more than once ; but it was not until 1667 that a truce for thirteen years was agreed to. At the same time all the terriory east of

the Dnieper was ceded to Muscovy—an arrangement to which the Poles would hardly have consented if they had not been suffering once more from the depredations of the Cossacks, and therefore in sore need of peace elsewhere.

Among the officers who had contributed to John Casimir's success at Zborow in 1649 was a young man of twenty-five years of age, John Sobieski, the youngest son of the castellan of Cracow. As a reward for his services he was appointed governor of Javorow, and throughout the wars which followed his reputation as a soldier constantly increased. For a few months he joined Charles X. in 1655; but he soon returned to his allegiance, and bore a prominent part in the ultimate defeat of the Swedes, as well as in the war with Muscovy. By the end of the reign he was grand hetman of the crown, and it was he who now marched against the Cossacks; and, although he had only 10,000 men to oppose to at least 80,000 invaders, he defeated them at Podhajce. When, as we shall see, the succeeding years brought them back again, with the Turks and the Tatars as well, the terrific struggle that ensued added still more to the lustre of Sobieski's fame.

The constitutional disorders of Poland during this reign were as serious as those which came from

relations with the neighbouring States. For the first time, the privilege of *liberum veto* began to be used by individual members to "explode" the Diet whenever they objected to its proceedings, and everything that had been accomplished during the meeting was thereby annulled. The king, like his predecessor, tried to get rid of this abuse, but the opposition of the nobles was too much for him. Trouble of another sort arose through the refusal of the *szlachta* to support the burdens of the State, and a dangerous mutiny broke out among the soldiers, who could get neither pay nor food. More than once the disturbances culminated in civil war. At last John Casimir became weary of the unending struggle, and, in 1668, he abdicated and retired to France to spend his remaining years in peace. There his death occurred in 1672.

At the election which followed, a French and an Austrian candidate divided the favour of the magnates, but the *szlachta* wished for a Piast, or native of Poland, and to the general astonishment, as well as his own, Michael Wisniowiecki was proclaimed king. No sooner, however, had the nobles set him, all unwilling, upon the throne, than they began to plot to get him out of it, and among the conspirators the primate and Sobieski were the most active. Their intentions were discovered, and the conspirators were pardoned, for

the king was not strong enough to punish them; but their plots began again two years later. Meanwhile, at the instigation of the Sultan, the Cossacks had invaded the Ukraine, and Sobieski, still in command of the Polish armies, marched to meet them, and scattered them at Kalniki. A combined attack by Cossacks and Turks followed, with no better success. Then, in 1672, a vast force of 300,000 Turks invaded Podolia, and captured Kamieniec. All resistance was overborne, and Michael agreed, by the Treaty of Budziak, to cede Podolia and the Polish Ukraine to the Sultan, and to pay a yearly tribute.

The Diet refused to ratify so infamous a treaty, and, the next year, preparations were made on a large scale for a renewal of the war. The decisive action was fought at Chocim on the south side of the Dniester, in November. Led by Sobieski himself, the Poles and Lithuanians delivered an assault on the strong fortress, surrounded by ravines, which was held by the Turkish commander, and in an hour it was captured. The retreating Turks were cut off and driven into the flooded river; altogether they are said to have lost 40,000 men. At that very moment the throne of Poland was vacant once more; Michael had died on the eve of the battle. To those who wished to be ruled by a Pole the conqueror of

Chocim seemed his obvious successor, and the appearance of Sobieski at Warsaw with great numbers of Turkish captives put an end to all opposition. Six months after the victory Sobieski was elected King of Poland as John III.

In spite of their recent defeat the Turks were by no means inclined for peace, and the temporary absence of Sobieski at the capital gave them the opportunity of defeating a Polish army at Chocim and retaking the fortress. The king did not wait for his coronation, but hurried back at once to the scene of the struggle. He speedily captured several fortresses; but, before he could get into touch with the main body of the enemy, his forces were weakened by the withdrawal of the Lithuanians, whose leader, Pac, had long been his personal foe. In the following summer he found himself besieged at Zorawno; the position seemed desperate, and his soldiers were with difficulty induced to persist in their resistance; yet, for seven weeks, he kept the Turks at bay, and at last forced them to retreat, whereupon a peace was concluded by which Poland regained two-thirds of the Ukraine, while Kamieniec remained in the possession of the Sultan.

There followed some years of peace abroad, but the disorder within the state increased. The Diet had been as niggardly as usual in the face of

the Turkish peril; and now that it was over—for the time—the *szlachta* obstinately refused to support the king in his plans for strengthening the country's defences in view of its inevitable return. Diet after diet was dissolved by the fatal veto. Dissension and disloyalty were rife among the nobles. That this was due in part to Sobieski's own activity in sowing the seeds of treachery and treason in earlier days cannot be denied; in part it was due also to the evil influence of the Queen, Marie Casimir, formerly a maid of honour to Marie Louise of France, whose anger at a slight which she considered that she had received from Louis XIV. led to an open breach between the French and Polish courts. Thereafter Louis spared neither efforts nor money in the attempt to undermine Sobieski's position, and at this time many of the Polish nobles were in his pay, and made no secret of their foreign allegiance.

The king was driven into alliance with the Emperor, with whose interests, indeed, his own were becoming more and more closely identified. The Pope was endeavouring, at this time, to promote a league of the Christian powers against the Turks, with the object of expelling them from Europe. The Turks, on the other hand, were planning an advance on a large scale, and were even hoping to extend their empire to the Baltic

itself. Both Poland and Austria were in danger, and, in spite of the unwillingness of the Diet, Sobieski decided to co-operate with his old enemy and agreed to put 40,000 men into the field, the Emperor promising 60,000. The struggle was now close at hand. At the end of June, 1683, little more than a month after the alliance had been formally completed, an army of 300,000 Turks under the command of the Vizier, Kara Mustafa, marched upon Vienna. The defences of the city were in a deplorable condition, and the Emperor promptly fled with his whole court. But the governor, Stahremberg, did all that was possible in repairing the fortifications, and the Duke of Lorraine, with 30,000 Austrians attempted to stem the Turkish advance, while frantic messages were sent to Cracow to summon Sobieski. The story of the raising of the famous siege has often been told, and a bare outline is all that need be given here. The defence had held out for 58 days, and was at the last gasp, when the King of Poland arrived upon the scene with an army consisting of Saxons, Bavarians and Austrians, as well as Poles—70,000 men in all. His attack was delivered on September 12, the great Turkish army was utterly routed, and an enormous booty was left in the hands of the victors. After some weeks' delay, occasioned by the graceless behaviour of

the Emperor towards the saviour of his people, the allied forces set out in pursuit of the Turks as they retreated through Hungary, and another victory was won at Parkan.

Thus ended the last great attack of the Porte upon the liberties of Europe. Everywhere the news of the relief of Vienna was hailed as telling the salvation of Christendom. The universal feeling was expressed in the words from which the sermon was preached at the thanksgiving service in the Austrian capital: "There was a man sent from God whose name was John."

A year later, Poland, Austria, Venice and the Pope formed a Holy League against the Sultan, to which, in 1686, the accession of Muscovy was obtained in return for the surrender of Kieff by Poland. But Sobieski, unsupported by his Diet, could not maintain the struggle, and his efforts to recover Kamieniec were never successful. His last years brought him a succession of disappointments. He wished to secure the throne for his son, James Sobieski (whose daughter, Clementina, afterwards married James Stuart, the Old Pretender to the throne of England), but the opposition of the nobles made it impossible; his domestic life was embittered by the caprices and quarrels of his wife; his attempts to allay the incessant discords within the State, which he foresaw would bring it to ruin,

were ineffective. At length he retired from public activity altogether. When he died in 1696, the decline of Poland entered upon its last and rapidly accelerating stage.

The election of his successor exhibited afresh the rivalries of the great European powers, who began, from this time, to treat Poland as a mere pawn in the game of foreign politics. It was obviously to the interest of France to regain her influence in a country which might prove an effective ally in the event of trouble with the Empire. On the other hand, the fact that France was the friend of the Porte could not fail to make Muscovy the bitter opponent of any candidate whom the French king might propose. Eventually Prince Louis of Conti and Frederic Augustus, the Elector of Saxony, were both elected by their respective supporters; but Peter the Great had already announced that the choice of Louis would be regarded as a breach of the truce between Muscovy and Poland, and Augustus, encouraged by the Tsar's support, took up arms. A struggle ensued in which the Prince of Conti was speedily worsted, and Augustus II. was crowned at Cracow in 1697. His adherence to the Holy League soon involved him and his Saxon soldiers in war against the Turks; two years later, peace was signed at Karlowitz, and Podolia, with Kamieniec, as

well as a part of the Ukraine, was restored to Poland.

In the same year that he ascended the throne, Charles XII. had become king of Sweden at the age of fifteen. To the Tsar, busy with schemes for the development and aggrandisement of Russia, the occasion seemed auspicious for the conquest of Livonia; and Augustus, who was anxious to find fresh conquests for his Saxons to win, was easily persuaded to join in the enterprise. War was therefore declared on Sweden in 1700, and at first the arms of Augustus met with some success; but very soon he had cause to regret the rashness which had made him despise the youthfulness of his enemy. Charles XII. shattered the Russian forces at Narva, crossed the Dwina, and invaded Lithuania, where he was joined by some of the most powerful nobles. Then he pressed on into Poland, and took Warsaw and Cracow, whereupon Augustus fled to Saxony. The victor procured the king's deposition by the Diet, and the election, in his place, of Stanislas Leszczynski, the young Palatine of Posen, who had been a candidate for the throne at the previous election. Stanislas had many of the qualities of a good ruler, but the circumstances of the time gave him no opportunity of using them for his subjects' benefit, for Poland had become a vast armed camp in which the

partisans of the rival kings, as well as those who merely hoped to obtain some private advantage from the prevailing anarchy, ravaged the country unceasingly. But in 1709 the arms of Charles went down before the Muscovites at Poltava, and the disaster left Stanislas without support upon his throne. He escaped from the kingdom, and Augustus was re-elected by the Diet.

It was the Tsar who had made the restoration possible, and his influence upon Polish affairs now began steadily to increase. Until 1720, while the Northern War lasted, Muscovite troops were quartered in various parts of the country and were guilty of great excesses, the king meanwhile being powerless to restrain either his own subjects or his allies. When peace was concluded at Nystad in 1721, Peter obtained in Esthonia and Livonia that for which he had fought—an ice-free coast whereby his people could be admitted to the commerce and culture of Western Europe; but no compensation was offered to Poland for the losses which it had sustained. Worst of all, it was Peter's deliberate aim to perpetuate all those elements in Polish public life which were responsible for the weakness of the State; and he contrived, by means of the disaffected nobles, to manipulate the *liberum veto* so as to prevent any action by

the Diet which was opposed to his interests. Seven Diets were exploded in this way during Augustus's reign, while, in the time of his son Augustus III., the Muscovite policy was continued so successfully that things became even worse, and only one of the Diets escaped the same fate.

Frederic Augustus died in February 1733, and three months later the nobles met and resolved that the new king must be by birth a Pole. This was done in order to facilitate the election of Stanislas Lesczynski, who, having spent some years in Sweden, was now living quietly in France, where his daughter Marie was the wife of Louis XV. The chief supporter of Stanislas among the Poles was the primate, Potocki, through whose influence, backed up by the liberal distribution of French gold, he was elected in September. But both Austria and Russia refused to accept the decision, the former opposing Stanislas as the friend of France, the latter as the friend of Sweden. They adopted as their candidate the late king's son, Augustus of Saxony, and promised to support him, if necessary, with their arms. A considerable Russian force was sent into Poland, and Stanislas, who had no means of resisting, fled to Dantzig, to wait until help should arrive from France. Unfortunately for him, no help worth the name

was forthcoming; and, after standing a siege of 135 days, the town surrendered, the king having previously escaped in disguise. The war dragged on for another year, and then, by the Peace of Vienna in 1735, the election of Augustus III. was formally recognised.

Of his reign of thirty years, or of himself, there is little to be told. He continued for the most part to reside in Saxony, took no interest in affairs of state, and found his chief pleasure in hunting. His minister, Heinrich Brühl, was already entrusted with practically the whole responsibility of government in Saxony; he was now expected to look after Poland as well. But, as we have seen, legislation by the Diet had become impossible, and neither Brühl nor anyone else could effect any real improvement in the condition of the kingdom until that fatal blot upon the constitution, the veto, had first been abolished. And to this reform the natural instincts of the majority of the nobles, no less than the machinations of Austria and Russia, formed an insuperable barrier. Yet there was growing up at this very time an enlightened national movement, aiming at political reform, and seeking to prepare the way for it by the only possible means—education. Its leaders were the Czartoryskis, a great Lithuanian family, one member of which, Frederick Michael, was

now Grand-Chancellor of Lithuania, and another, his brother Augustus, a distinguished soldier, was Palatine of Red Russia, while their sister Constantia was the wife of Stanislas Poniatowski, whose son of the same name succeeded Augustus on the throne of Poland in 1763. A fellow-worker for reform was the educationalist Konarsky, to whom the Czartoryskis gave their encouragement and support. Their plan was to collect young men of promise at their palaces for training in political principles; they recognised that no reform was possible until the nation as a whole could be induced to demand it. During the first twenty years of the new reign they exerted a powerful influence at the Saxon court, and their aspirations were supported by Brühl, who handed over to them the control of Polish affairs. But their failure in the face of a hostile Diet at length convinced them that the obstacles in their path would yield to nothing short of armed force; and when the king and his minister refused to entertain the idea, they turned to Russia for help. It was really inconceivable that Russia should be willing to join in any scheme for the strengthening of the kingdom; on the contrary, its existing condition of stagnation and anarchy was exactly the one most desired. Frederick the Great, of Prussia, had already formed plans for the

dismemberment of Poland, and the accession of Catherine II. to the Russian throne in 1762 brought him a willing accomplice. The death of Augustus in the following year ushered in the final catastrophe.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST PARTITION OF POLAND

THE year 1763 was pregnant with disaster for Poland. In that year the throne was vacant by the death of Augustus III. The system of succession was elective, not hereditary, and, therefore, the assembly of the Diet was required to nominate the new sovereign, a fact which practically invited the interference of interested outsiders. Evils of long standing had, by this, contributed to the decadence of the country, and ever since the death of Sobieski, in 1696, the condition of Poland had been one of deplorable and increasing anarchy. It was afflicted with the most vicious constitution conceivable, and, in the characteristics of a State, it was as lacking as the Holy Roman Empire. The monarchy being elective and not hereditary, the consistency and stability essential for the survival of a State were lacking. The landowners formed a powerful and exclusive caste intent on magnifying its own influence in the State, and careless whether the status of the monarch was thereby circumscribed or not. The king, indeed, was but a mere figurehead with no

real control, and but nominally the head of the Executive and the Army. The monstrous characteristic of the Diet, by which its decisions were only valid if unanimous, left the administration at the mercy of a single discontented senator, and in an assembly of Nestors, one Thersites could paralyse the Government by the utterance of two simple words : *Nie pozwalam*—" I do not assent." To these fatal defects was added, as a natural corollary, the custom by which discontented nobles, thwarted in the Diet, summoned rival assemblies and supported them by force of arms. Had Poland been an island Power she might possibly have prolonged, with impunity, this travesty of a constitution. But, situated as she was in the very core of Europe, she was at the mercy of any powerful neighbour. It was the misfortune of Poland that, in 1763, the neighbouring thrones were filled by exceptionally able sovereigns, two of whom were filled with untrammelled desire for territorial expansion.

In the sixteenth century the Electors of Brandenburg had added to their dominions the Dukedom of Prussia, under Polish suzerainty. In 1657, Frederick William had flung off the yoke of Poland and, within gradually widening boundaries, Brandenburg-Prussia had grown into a kingdom. The Great Elector steadily pursued his way through

immense difficulties until he had succeeded in laying the foundation of the future greatness of the House of Hohenzollern; like his successor, he realised that the government of Brandenburg must be an absolutism dependent on a standing army, and so German was the policy of these powerful Electors that, in order to secure the assistance of the army of Frederick III. (1688–1713), the Emperor Leopold granted the Elector of Brandenburg the title of King of Prussia. Third on the list of Prussian kings stands the name of the greatest of them all —Frederick the Great. In 1740 he ascended the throne, and at once began to realise the dream of an unhappy boyhood—the acquisition of military power. Money was at hand, and, from his father, Frederick inherited the best-drilled army in Europe.

The greed of Frederick, which was later to batten on the dismembered body of Poland, was whetted on the dominions of the House of Austria. Maria Theresa became mistress of them the very year in which Frederick was crowned king of Prussia, and at once a rapacious host rose around the hapless princess, greedy to despoil her of her realms. Foremost in the band of brigands was Frederick of Prussia, who pounced upon Silesia and wrested it from the young ruler. Several victories in 1741 and 1742 left him master of the

coveted lands. Maria Theresa, frightened by the energy and skill of her formidable antagonist, and anxious to band all her energies against her other foes, made over to him, by the Treaty of Breslau, the full sovereignty of Silesia. In 1745 Frederick was once again in arms. The death of the Elector of Bavaria, who had assumed the Imperial dignity, took place in 1745, and the husband of Maria Theresa became Emperor in his stead. Alarmed lest the newly-won Silesia might be wrested from his grasp, Frederick had taken the field; but, though victorious in the campaign of 1745, he was glad to sheathe the sword, and, by the Treaty of Dresden, which closed the war in Germany, he acknowledged the husband of Maria Theresa as head of the Empire.

To follow the dazzling career of the great and ambitious soldier is outside the scope of this work. Sufficient it is to say that, after a breathing space of eight years, Frederick allied himself with England against a confederation of other Great Powers of Europe, and the long Seven Years' War began. From this tremendous struggle Frederick emerged as unquestionably the greatest soldier in Europe, having won imperishable renown as a daring general and a consummate tactician. The defence by Frederick the Great of his dominions in the Seven Years' War against the

forces of Austria, France and Russia stirred up the latent patriotic feelings of the numerous small German States, and henceforward Prussia entered upon a contest for the hegemony of Germany, which was only finally decided in her favour in 1871. In the year 1763, however, Prussia had suffered severely from the strain, for Frederick's victorious course had by no means been unchequered, and terrible mischief had been effected by the war. Many of the people were starving; portions of the State had been ravaged by fire and sword; Berlin had been pillaged by Austrian and Russian soldiers. Frederick set himself to repair the havoc caused by victory and defeat. The very year that the Seven Years' War had been concluded by the remaining participants, Austria and Prussia, with the Peace of Hubertsburg, the throne of Poland had fallen vacant. The fact that a fertile and decadent nation lay at his very threshold was not likely to escape the notice of a monarch earnestly anxious for the financial regeneration of his own country, conscious of his own outstanding military ability, and totally devoid of any scruples where merely the sufferings of non-Prussians were concerned.

No less extraordinary, perhaps, and certainly equally unmoral from the political point of view, was Catherine II., of Russia. The daughter of a

minor German prince—a Prussian officer of a somewhat commonplace type, and a member of the rigid Lutheran creed—Catherine, in her girlhood, was known as Sophia Augusta Frederica, Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst. In no respect did she give promise of pre-eminence over her sex, except for the fact that she was supposed to show signs of a "serious, cold, calculating mind." The turning point in her life was an invitation to St. Petersburg from the Empress of Russia; and, in 1744, the young princess, then a girl of but fifteen, set out for the Russian capital accompanied by her mother. The object of the visit was the marriage of the young guest to the Russian heir apparent, and, at the end of 1745, she and the Grand Duke Peter were made man and wife. The heir to the throne, however, was a brutal drunkard, who neglected his young wife, devoted his time to carousals and *amours*, and showed clearly every day his entire unfitness to become the ruler of Russia. The shrewd princess accommodated herself to her difficult position, and, with an insight and judgment remarkable in one so young, quickly decided that, to win her way, she must be in all things Russian. To this end she learnt the language and adopted the Orthodox faith; she received the name Catherine; and when her mother was obliged to leave Russia, and her father died

in 1747, she had no longer any connexion with her home in Germany.

With a drunkard for a mate, Catherine's early years of married life were lonely and irksome, but she steadily persevered in her self-appointed course of instruction; while, at the same time, her passionate and vigorous nature led her to love-passages and intrigues. Husband and wife drifted further apart, and, indeed, politically belonged to opposing sides, so that, when the Grand Duke Peter succeeded to the throne upon the death of the Empress Elizabeth in 1762, so estranged were the royal couple by this date, that, within a short time after the accession of Peter, Catherine was privy to his dethronement and murder. But there was no question of her merely holding the regency for her son—a minor. Her innate fitness for personal rule was soon made manifest. Endowed with a powerful intellect and an excellent judge of men she soon dominated the situation. Not the least important of the characteristics displayed by her after grasping the reins of State was an overweening ambition for the territorial expansion of her adopted country. The first problem she had to face was the attitude to be adopted towards Prussia. The peace which concluded the Seven Years' War had been made without reference to Russia, and, indeed, without

the aid of the latter's mediation, which had been offered and refused. Catherine and Frederick were, however, soon drawn together. Each respected and admired the intellectual calibre of the other. A political correspondence distinguished by its gracefulness of style, no less than by its statesman-like shrewdness, ensued. But what really brought the two sovereigns together was a community of interest in the matter of the fate of Poland.

The lot of the third participant in the crime of the dismemberment of Poland had been different from that of her fellow-conspirators. Maria Theresa, upon whom the succession to the Hapsburg dominions had devolved, was but an inexperienced girl at the time when that greatness had been thrust upon her. On October 20, 1740, the Emperor Charles VI. had died, and two questions were at once placed before Europe for decision —the succession to the Empire and the succession to the Hapsburg dominions. By a law called the "Pragmatic Sanction," Charles VI. had decreed that, if he left no son, his dominions should descend to his daughter. One by one—in some cases, with trouble and delay—the Great Powers of Europe had been induced to consent to this arrangement. His daughter Maria Theresa thereupon became mistress of the hereditary dominions of the House of Austria. From the very outset of her rule

the young sovereign had really to rely upon herself alone; the husband she loved so dearly proved neither a pillar of strength in the council nor a capable commander in the field; and, of her ministers, none at first emerged from mediocrity. The crowned bandits of Europe closed round the hapless princess, and Frederick the Great set the example of robbery by invading Silesia and defeating the Austrians. Europe was electrified at the unexpected success of Prussia, and France seized the opportunity to deal a telling blow at the hapless Maria Theresa. The decision of the French Government encouraged Spain, Bavaria, and Saxony to claim portions of the Hapsburg inheritance, and Sardinia to look for a share of Austrian spoils.

Acting on the advice of the British Government, Maria Theresa yielded Silesia to Frederick in 1742, and, freed from this war, she was in a better position to withstand her other and still numerous foes. In the previous year, when her territories were invaded by a Franco-Bavarian army, she had retired into Hungary and flung herself upon the chivalry of the brave Magyars. The Hungarian nobility promised fidelity with the stirring cry, *Moriamur pro rege nostro Maria Theresa,* crowned her Queen of Hungary, and came to her rescue with large bodies of troops. The

French who held Prague were forced to retreat in the depth of a severe winter. Again was Maria Theresa called upon to contend with the ambitious Prussian king, and even when that struggle was brought temporarily to an end in 1745, war continued in the Netherlands and Italy between the houses of Bourbon and Hapsburg until the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1748, gave rest, for a time, to worn-out Europe. Eight years of uneasy peace ensued, but Maria Theresa was determined to recover Silesia, and, in 1756, the moment for striking appeared favourable. England and France were drifting into war over their respective colonial interests in America, and George II. of England, trembling for the safety of his beloved Hanover, in the war which he saw to be inevitable, formed an alliance with Frederick of Prussia. Open war was soon declared, in which the Great Powers of Europe ranged themselves on one side or the other. Till 1763 this struggle went on, when Austria and Prussia now confronted each other alone. Frederick was victorious, and the Peace of Hubertsburg left the face of Germany on the whole unchanged. Frederick still held Silesia, for the sake of which the blood of more than a million had been poured out like water.

Such was, in brief, the history of Maria Theresa, so far as it was affected by external events, up

to the year 1763, when the vacancy occurred in the succession to the Polish throne. Her lot had been a hard one, and, until the date in question, it had been almost one long and unsuccessful struggle against Prussian aggression. An enlightened and capable woman, who checked the Inquisition and suppressed the Jesuits, and was imbued with the doctrines of enlightened despotism, her instincts were not by nature predatory; although, in her relation to the Polish question, she was to show the truth of the proverb that appetite comes with eating.

Augustus III. had died on the 5th October, and the Empress Catherine and Frederick the Great of Prussia soon came to an agreement as to the candidate whom they would jointly run for the Polish throne. The conspirators were acting on no mere impulse, but were putting into execution plans long laid. Catherine had well pondered the fourth clause of the testament of Peter the Great—"To divide Poland by stirring up dissension and continual jealousy. To gain over the nobles with gold. To influence the lukewarm and corrupt them so as to control the elections to the throne. To raise partisans and protect them. To arrange for the intervention of Russian troops, and for their stay in Poland pending their final occupation of the country; and, in case of foreign

intervention, to smooth away any protests." As for Frederick, he had actively interested himself in a project for the partition of Poland as far back as 1733. In that year Augustus II., hoping to make the throne of Poland hereditary in his House of Saxony, and with a view to appeasing the neighbouring sovereigns, proposed to cede part of his dominions, and made overtures to this effect to Frederick William I., the King of Prussia. Frederick the Great, then Prince Royal, had urged his father to take advantage of the unexpected offer, but the death of Augustus put an end to the scheme. Frederick, however, never lost sight of the possibilities of territorial aggrandisement at the expense of Poland, and the assistance of Catherine prompted him to action in 1763.

With a cynical disregard for any possible predilection Poland might have had for royal blood, they fixed upon a young Pole who was not even of high birth on his father's side. This was Count Stanislas Poniatowski, a young man of ordinary lineage, although, on his mother's side, he was closely related to "the Family,"* his uncle being Prince Czartoryski. This young Poniatowski had no further recommendations than exceedingly good

* This was the name given to the powerful Czartoryskis.

looks, an affable manner, and an ease and polish gathered from the drawing-rooms of various European capitals. He was, however, by no means unknown to Catherine, for, in 1756, he had been attached to the suite of the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, who, blending diplomacy with intrigue, deliberately threw the charming young Pole in the way of the impressionable Grand Duchess, with the result which might reasonably have been expected. Poniatowski became one on the long list of the royal paramours, occupying this position without the embarrassment of concealment, and apparently with the full assent of the Grand Duke Peter. Later, he was, for political reasons, sent back to Poland; but Catherine had not forgotten her former lover. A shrewd judge of men, she had appraised him at his real worth, and his weakness of character had shown her that he might be made the submissive agent in any scheme. She therefore determined to foist him upon the Polish people as their king. When one of her emissaries told her that the Polish aristocracy was enraged at the bare proposal of having a king whose father had been merely a steward on a small estate, she did, indeed, blush —but merely at the thought that one so base had been her lover. No shame was felt by this determined woman in forcing an ignoble sovereign on

a haughty people. The news of Poniatowski's birth served but to confirm her in her purpose. "Were he the steward himself," she replied, "I wish him to become king, and king he shall be."

That the determination of the Empress of Russia was to be backed up by all the means at her disposal is abundantly clear from the contents of a letter addressed by her to her ambassador in Poland while the election to the vacant throne was still undecided. "These are your orders," she wrote. "Firstly: although I have ordered all preparations for war and have, indeed, sent a large portion of my army to the frontier ready to cross it at a moment's notice, I desire that the election of my candidate may be carried out without disturbance and without civil war. If, however, matters should, unfortunately, take an unfavourable turn, I am determined to employ to the utmost all the means, which Providence has placed at my disposal, to terminate the Polish business to my advantage. Secondly, you are to employ all the money you have available and also 100,000 roubles, which I am sending you, to add to the number of adherents to my party. I do not propose to dictate to you the method of disbursing this money, because I know you will use it to the best advantage. I rely on your prudence and your knowledge of the country. Nevertheless,

I must direct your attention particularly to the members of the Diet, so that they may be elected in my interest. It is essential to have emissaries active and well-provided with gold . . . If my candidate is not elected, then, without further ado, I shall order my troops to invade Poland at all points and to treat the enemy as rebels, and to harry with fire and sword their possessions and property. Should this happen, I shall have the assistance of the King of Prussia."

Under such auspices the Diet assembled on the 7th May, 1764. There was a strong party of Polish nobles bitterly opposed to the election of young Poniatowski and in favour of the son of the late king. The gold of Catherine had, however, done its work, while, to render matters doubly sure, she had sent an army of 15,000 men to Warsaw. The Russian soldiers surrounded the building in which the Diet was assembled, while the armed retainers of Czartoryski—who supported his nephew's cause—actually held the staircase leading to the chamber and filled the seats usually reserved for the general public. The aged Count Malachowski, president of the Diet, declaring that freedom of election was impossible in the presence of foreign troops, refused to open the session. Instead of raising his staff, the signal for the commencement of proceedings, Malachowski resolutely

held it downwards. A crowd of Russian soldiers with drawn swords rushed towards him and endeavoured to intimidate him into declaring the assembly open.

The intrepid president still refused, and was then summoned to deliver his staff into other hands. "Never," replied the old man. "You may cut off my hand or you may take my life; but as I am a marshal elected by a free people, so by a free people only can I be deposed. I wish to leave the place." He was surrounded on all sides by angry soldiers and by pro-Russian deputies, but eventually he was safely conducted from the building. The pro-Russian members thereupon called one of the Family to take the chair, and proceedings began. The actual election of a sovereign was, however, deferred, and it was not until September 7 that Poniatowski was elected king, taking the name of Stanislas-Augustus. At this election the number of deputies taking part was only a mere fraction of the number qualified to sit. Seven provinces were unrepresented. But this was through no lack of Polish patriotism; the dearth of senators was due to the organisation of Catherine. Russian troops had been sent to hold the roads and to deny passage to the representatives of the nation. Catherine had secured her end; and, as she afterwards very truly

remarked, " the candidate who had the least right had been elected; he must therefore feel under an especial debt to Russia."

In the first flush of kingship the new ruler showed symptoms of a weak flavour of patriotism. But he was in reality bound hand and foot to Russia. As Prince Repin, the Russian agent, put it with brutal candour: " I am your master. You can only retain your crown by submission to me." This arrogance was sufficient to intimidate Stanislas-Augustus into subjection, and to pave the way for actual intervention by Austria, Prussia and Russia in the affairs of Poland. An occasion soon presented itself. Amongst the reforms projected by Stanislas-Augustus was the abolition of the legislative absurdity which for centuries had hung like a millstone round the neck of Poland—the *liberum veto*. The fundamental evil of this anomaly was that absolute unanimity was required in all resolutions, and its paralysing influence had been patent to all but the most reactionary Poles. Russia was seriously alarmed at this effort at reform. " She had thought to have a corpse within her grasp, and lo! its heart was once more beating."* Catherine's ambassador at Warsaw was instructed to hinder any improvement in the existing legislative machinery, and Prussia

* Henri Grappin, " Histoire de Pologne," p. 135.

sided with Russia in demanding that the *liberum veto* should be maintained, so that the Diet might be precluded from passing any constructive measures.

Frederick and Catherine were anxiously keeping Poland under the lens, searching for excuses for still further interference, and their patience was soon rewarded. In religious matters Poland had been especially distinguished by a wise tolerance; but the fact that three great Churches were represented throughout the kingdom led to a struggle for supremacy similar in form to that which had harried other parts of Europe. In Great Poland the immense majority of the inhabitants were Roman Catholics, while those in Lithuania were mostly of the Greek Church, and the Baltic Province contained a large number of Lutherans. The Roman Catholic party had asserted its superiority in 1756, when a law was passed by the Diet excluding non-Catholics from holding offices under the State. This action caused immense dissatisfaction amongst the Dissidents, as they were called, and gave Russia and Prussia some claim to intervention, of which they quickly availed themselves. Russia espoused the cause of her Lithuanian co-religionists of the Greek Church, while Prussia took up the cause of the Lutherans, with the result that the Diet, in 1767, was forced to rescind its decree.

During the greater part of this year of 1768 the Diet legislated within a cordon of Russian bayonets, and, in the latter year, it promised to maintain its archaic constitution in return for a guarantee of the integrity of Poland on the part of Russia.

Catherine, however, had gone a step too far. The minority in the Diet, although compelled to acquiesce in the legislation just recorded, seceded from that assembly and formed the Confederation of Bar,* pledged to refuse to acknowledge all concessions to the Dissidents and the treaty with Russia. A terrible local war began between Russia and the Confederates, and, in their hour of need, these appealed to Turkey for assistance, who thereupon declared war on Russia. It was a fatal step for Poland to have asked and received help from Turkey, for her prestige as the ancient bulwark against Islam was thereby shattered. Worse still, it gave Russia the opportunity of sending further reinforcements into Poland. Prussia followed suit; and Austria, not to be left behind in the scramble, revived an ancient claim to the small Palatinate of Zips, near the Hungarian border, and, without waiting for the claim to be considered, occupied the disputed territory with a contingent of troops. A further, and perhaps less

* A small town in Podolia.

reprehensible, excuse for intervention by the three neighbouring Powers was afforded by an outbreak of plague, which broke out in Poland in 1770. With the ostensible view of localising the epidemic, Russia, Prussia and Austria employed troops to watch the frontiers and to control communication with the infected area. With a motive outwardly humanitarian, it was not difficult to find pretexts for advancing these cordons well into Polish territory, and thus to obtain a footing for the next spring.

The patriotic efforts of the Confederation of Bar proved a failure, and an attempt to carry off the king, apparently with the purpose of murdering him, likewise miscarried. The conspirators engaged in this enterprise were about forty in number, and, on Sunday night, the 3rd of September, 1771, a select band of them repaired to a street in Warsaw, where the king was expected to pass on his way to the palace. He came, on this occasion, between nine and ten o'clock, in a carriage, with an aide-de-camp and accompanied by some fifteen or sixteen attendants. The carriage was stopped, and, after a scuffle in the dark, the king was pulled from it and dragged along the ground between the horses of the conspirators, who galloped through the streets of Warsaw. Having gained the outskirts of the city, the attackers lost their way,

and, putting the king on a led horse, they at last found themselves in a wood only two or three miles from Warsaw. The question of putting the king to death was now discussed, but the appearance of some Russian patrols caused all the conspirators to take to flight except the ringleader, Kosinski. Proceeding now on foot the couple wandered on, the king, who was exhausted by fatigue, frequently entreating his captor for the grace of a few moments' rest. Soon Kosinski showed signs of repentance, and, after gaining admission into a small mill, he allowed his sovereign to send a note to the officer commanding the Foot Guards, announcing his plight and begging for assistance. That officer immediately galloped to the mill with a detachment of troops, and found the king sleeping on the ground overcome by fatigue and covered by the miller's coat. He was brought back to Warsaw in a carriage, reaching the palace about five in the morning. A wound which he had received in the struggle of the night before proved not dangerous, and the king soon recovered from the rough treatment to which he had been subjected. Thus ended the daring enterprise of the Confederates, several of whom paid the penalty on the scaffold. The attempt on the king's life seems to have sent a thrill of horror through the palaces of Europe, and to have alienated

any sympathy which may have existed for the Confederation of Bar.

So far, Austria was not so deeply involved in any question of the partition of Poland as Russia and Prussia. The puppet king had been the nominee solely of the two latter Powers, and the Confederation of Bar had obtained the support of Austria. That Power, too, being very largely Roman Catholic, had not been called upon to intervene in the religious question which had given Russia and Prussia an opening. Further, the traditional policy of Austria had been to maintain the integrity of the Polish kingdom, and all these circumstances tended to make the proposal of partition repugnant to Maria Theresa. Her son Joseph, however, who had by this been elected Emperor of Germany, held different views, and was quite prepared to join in with Prussia. After some considerable discussion between the three Powers, a Treaty of Partition was signed between Russia and Prussia early in 1772, and, some months later, Austria joined in the compact. By the treaty thus signed—the preamble of which made the amazing announcement that it was effected "In the name of the Holy Trinity"—Poland was deprived of about one-third of its territory and almost a third of its population. Prussia acquired Ermeland and what was called

Royal Prussia (the West Prussia of to-day), with the exception of Danzig and Thorn, two towns on which the Prussian king had set his heart, but on which he had been forced to give way. He had, however, been able to realise his dream of bridging over the gap between Brandenburg and East Prussia. Frederick's view of his acquisition is given by himself in his "History of My Own Times":—"This was one of the most important acquisitions which we could make, because it joined Pomerania and Eastern Prussia; as it rendered us masters of the Vistula, we gained the double advantage of a defensible frontier to the kingdom, and the power to levy considerable tolls on the Vistula, by which river the whole trade of Poland was carried on." Austria obtained part of Little Poland (except Cracow) and the greater part of East Galicia, then called Red Russia. To Russia fell the strip of Livonia which had remained a Polish possession, with White Russia along the Dwina and the Dnieper.

The three Great Powers immediately tried to justify their high-handed action by an assertion of claims to the territory sequestrated, apparently with the idea of placating any feeling of generous sympathy which neutral States might feel for Poland. The action of Russia, Prussia and Austria has been variously viewed by different his-

torians. According to one competent authority, there was no historical justification for the extension of Austria; but Prussia and Russia, by the First Treaty of Partition, only took territories to which they could assert well-founded claims. For Polish Prussia had formerly been under German rule, and the districts taken by Russia were inhabited by Russian-speaking Greek Catholics.* Most men of average morality will, however, probably feel themselves in complete agreement with the opinion of Lord Eversley.† The claims, in his opinion, "were not worth the paper on which they were written. The only effect was to show how little could be alleged in favour of the transactions. Poland had been in unquestioned possession of these territories for upward of two hundred years." Certainly the Poles themselves, and even their puppet king, were of this mind, and a formal protest was made against the mockeries of claims put forward. Austria, put up as the spokesman of the conspirators, professed to have received this humble manifesto "with unspeakable astonishment."

Having dismembered the body of the country, the three Powers seemed bent on crushing the very soul of the people. Insult was to be added to injury, and the cup of humiliation was to be

* "Cambridge Modern History," vol. vi., p. 669.

† "The Partitions of Poland," by Lord Eversley, p. 56.

drained to the dregs. The pillagers had set their hearts on having their act of robbery solemnly ratified by the Diet of the unfortunate country. By occupying Warsaw with Russian, Austrian and Prussian troops, by profuse bribery, and by every method of persuasion, compulsion and fraud, the Diet was at length brought to sanction the dismemberment of the nation it represented. The first partition of Poland was now complete, and the three Great Powers were already in possession of the spoil.

In this great European crime, it is difficult to assign the proper quota of guilt to the two chief conspirators, Frederick and Catherine. Maria Theresa only consented to it with reluctance, and it is incontestable that the initiative lay with the other two sovereigns. Historians vary in their verdict as regards the Empress of Russia and the Prussian King; the matter is, indeed, now unimportant, and the question of their comparative villainy may be passed by. But though it does not excuse the action of Russia and Prussia, the truth is that the partition of Poland was practically bound to occur sooner or later. From the military point of view the situation of the country had long been insecure. East and west Poland was practically without natural frontiers, and when, on the one flank, Prussia, and on the other, Russia, had come to the fore, only a strong State could hold its

own against these two rising Powers. Poland was not a strong State, and was, therefore, overwhelmed. At one time it had seemed as if Turkey might have been the victim, instead of Poland, and a triple alliance between Russia, Prussia and the Emperor for the partition of Turkey had actually been projected in 1769, and the question of the dismemberment of that country was again put forward by Austria at the very moment when the first partition of Poland was impending. This, however, was by no means to the liking of Frederick the Great, who wished to keep Turkey in being as a possible ally in case of war against his fellow-conspirators, and who preferred a field of spoliation more easily accessible.

The combination of chicanery and violence displayed in the first partition seems to have created a painful impression on Europe. "It is difficult," wrote Lecky, "to exaggerate the extent to which it shook the political system, lowered the public morals, and weakened the public law of Europe: for it was an example of strong Powers conspiring to plunder a feeble Power, with no more regard for honour, or honesty, or the mere decency of appearances than is shown by a burglar or a footpad."*

* Lecky, "History of England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. v., p. 217.

CHAPTER IX

THE SECOND PARTITION OF POLAND

POLAND was not annihilated by the First Partition. Though she had lost about one-third of her territory, she still retained an important position amongst European States, for she was still third on the list as regards area and fifth in population. The scheme of a Greater Poland, to extend from "sea to sea"—from the Black Sea to the Baltic—was, indeed, now incapable of realisation; but such scheme had been the dream of visionaries rather than a living national ideal. The author of the phrase, "The Polish eagle has her resting-place on the peaks of the Carpathians, and stretches forth her wings, one to the Baltic, the other to the Black Sea," was a poet and not a statesman. Shorn of a fraction of her territory, it was not impossible for Poland to consolidate herself within a more restricted area and to assure herself of a future by a radical reform of her internal affairs.

The statement has, indeed, been seriously made that the diminution of the Polish State was, on the whole, an advantage to the Polish

people, and that Panin's contention that the wrested provinces would benefit by the transfer was perfectly true. Be this as it may, there are grounds for believing that the new constitution adopted by the Diet of 1775, which Russia invented to meet the new conditions of the kingdom, was far superior to any which the Poles of themselves had been able to devise. Not that the new constitution was free from glaring defects. The throne still continued to be elective, and the *liberum veto* was also retained. On the other hand, though the main error of the monarchical system was preserved, candidates for the throne were limited to native Poles or to the sons and grandsons of the reigning king; and, in other respects also, reforms of an eminently practical character were introduced. The executive was entrusted to a permanent and elective Council of State. Over this council the king was to preside, and he was to summon the Diet with its consent. The civil list was also revised, with the effect that the chief officers of State received adequate salaries. More important than all the above, the Polish army received attention, the establishment being fixed at 30,000 of all arms, or five times the strength maintained by Poland at the zenith of her power. But though these reforms, to the dispassionate student of history, seem destined to have made

for good order, internal prosperity, and political stability, they stank in the nostrils of the Polish people. They were inventions of the enemy, and, therefore, to be condemned; they were hateful to Polish patriotism, and tolerable only until they could be replaced.

In the year immediately following the First Partition, circumstances seemed to favour the revival of the despoiled nation on Polish lines, for two of the original despoilers were claimed by death. Maria Theresa died in 1780, and, six years later, Frederick the Great passed away. During these years Austria and Prussia withdrew their troops, but those of Catherine remained, and Poland was administered almost as if it were a Russian province. Nevertheless the regeneration of Poland went on apace. Such regeneration had, indeed, to be worked out by the Poles themselves, for it was impossible to expect assistance from the three Great Powers, whose sympathy might, in other times, be looked for. After the brilliant period of Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII., Sweden had sunk to a lowly position, and was busying herself mainly with her own immediate concerns. England was occupied with the American Revolution and with France, who sympathised with that movement. France herself was being weakened by the internal crisis from which the

great French Revolution was to spring. Nevertheless, throughout the length and breadth of Poland, and in every feature of national life, progress was to be observed. Commerce, agriculture and industry revived. The Jesuits were expelled in 1774, and the Government appointed an Educational Commission, which took over work formerly carried out by them. The Commission established an undenominational system of education, and arranged a course of studies admirably fitted for instruction in citizenship.

Properly speaking, this body can lay claim to be the parent of all existing Ministries of Education in the States of Europe. Its results were far-reaching, for narrow conservatism soon gave way to the growth of new ideals, and even the reactionary nobility was gradually tinged with a progressive spirit. But this movement of reform and regeneration was no protection against the designs of Poland's neighbours. Rumours were afloat of a fresh partition when, in 1787, Russia, conjointly with Austria, entered upon her second war with Turkey. An opportunity now seemed offered to the patriotic party in Poland for throwing off the Russian yoke, and some of the more vigorous national leaders determined to embrace it. Catherine, on her part, was anxious that the fighting qualities of the Poles might be at her disposal in

her war against the Turks, and proposed to her creature Stanislas that an alliance for that purpose should be entered on between them. The king was not unfavourable to the proposal of his ex-mistress, but, inasmuch as the proposed arrangement was contrary to existing treaties between Poland and the Porte, Stanislas had to inform Catherine that the alliance must be referred to the Diet, which was to assemble in October, 1788. That assembly, however, had other matters to settle, vastly more important to Poland than the furtherance of Catherine's territorial ambitions. A wave of patriotic enthusiasm was sweeping over the country—the forerunner of the democratic flood which was soon to burst forth in France—and when the Diet assembled it confederated itself so as to free its proceedings from the clogging influence of the *liberum veto.*

By this time the death of Frederick the Great had profoundly affected the balance of power in Europe. Prussia and Russia had begun to drift apart, and while the former began to draw closer to the Western Powers, Russia sided more and more with Austria. When the two latter declared war on the Porte in 1787, Prussia, England and Holland, alarmed at the growing Muscovite preponderance, banded themselves into a defensive alliance. Russia now

began to experience a serious setback, for, apart from the alliance against her, she was attacked, in the summer of 1788, by Gustavus III. of Sweden, at the head of 50,000 men, while the Turks held a Russian army at bay at Ochakov, and drove the Austrians into Transylvania. Eager to profit by Russia's difficulty, Prussia now approached Poland, offering the assistance of a corps of 40,000 men to aid in throwing off the Russian yoke. This sympathetic attitude of the new King of Prussia—although it but imperfectly concealed the fact that it was sympathy at a price, the price hoped for being Dantzig and Thorn—emboldened the Diet to ignore the menaces of Russia, and encouraged it to carry out a strong constructive policy of reform.

This famous "Four Years' Diet"—as it has come to be called—began the last period of Polish independence. It met under influences favourable for reform. Freed from the *liberum veto*, there was some chance of a constructive policy being brought into being. The majority of the deputies were young, enthusiastic, fired with genuinely patriotic ideals and brimful of public spirit. They were, however, opposed by an obstructionist minority of Russophil reactionaries, and were impeded by the king's party, which favoured alliance with Russia, though not at the price of

constitutional reform. But government of the people, by the people, for the people was not to be successfully carried out in a day; least of all in a country like Poland, where internal administration had long been in a chaotic state. The passage of acts of reform was hindered by interminable discussions, and, after three years' useless wrangling, led to a *coup d'état*, skilfully conducted by a combination of the reformers and the king's party. The time was favourable for such a movement. In the summer of 1790 Prussia had signed a treaty with Poland guaranteeing her integrity and promising assistance in case of attack by a third party, and, what was of no less importance at this crisis, was the formal approval of the King of Prussia towards constitutional reform in Poland.

On May 3, 1791, the question of the reform of the constitution was unexpectedly brought forward during a recess when most of the reactionary magnates were absent from Warsaw. The Marshal of the Diet opened the proceedings by reading a report, drawn up by the Committee of Foreign Affairs, in which a fresh partition of Poland was unanimously predicted. While the excitement caused by these tidings was at its height, the king read out a proposed form of constitution drawn up by the patriotic party.

It was opposed by a minority, one member of which advanced to the throne and prostrated himself before his sovereign, entreating the king to abandon the idea of hereditary succession, which, he declared, would be fatal to the liberty of Poland. But this theatrical exhibition served but to spur the patriotic party to action. Leaving their seats they rushed to the centre of the assembly and loudly demanded that the king should there and then swear to the new constitution. Stanislas thereupon called to him the Bishop of Cracow and took the oath at his hands, and, having sworn, called upon the members of the Diet to follow him to the cathedral of St. John to renew fidelity to the new Act. The members followed, all but some two score malcontents, and in the cathedral a *Te Deum* was sung amidst salvoes of artillery. The new Act of Reform was headed by the words, "All power in a State emanates from the people's will," but it is to be noted that during the proceedings of the Diet which had such a dramatic finish the approaches to the building had been lined with Polish troops.

The constitution thus brought into being by what was nothing less than a revolution decreed that the monarchy should be hereditary and limited, the successor to the reigning king to be

the Elector of Saxony and his heirs. The *liberum veto* was abolished. The franchise was to be extended to towns, and the burghers were to send deputies to the Diet on the same footing as the nobles. This was a privilege long in abeyance, and the absence of it had largely contributed to the stagnation of political life in the country. The condition of the peasantry was to be ameliorated. The Roman Catholic religion was to be the Established Church, but tolerance for other sects was expressly provided for. The army was to consist of 100,000 men. These were the main provisions of a constitution which was warmly received by the overwhelming majority of the Polish people. All night the streets of Warsaw were ablaze with illuminations. But, in spite of its sanction by king and nobles, and of its enthusiastic reception by the middle and lower classes, the new constitution had one damning fault: it came too late to save the nation.

The King of Prussia—in direct opposition, be it said, to the wishes of the Prussian Cabinet—sent Stanislas a complimentary letter congratulating him upon the new constitution. But if the Poles thought that platitudes from the weak-kneed Frederick William II. were to form a sure shield against the terrible Catherine, they were soon to be undeceived. The Empress of Russia had viewed

this reform movement in Poland with irritation, and news of the treaty between that country and Prussia roused her to fury. Scarcely had the new constitution been signed when three highly-placed Polish renegades hastened to St. Petersburg and there entered into a secret convention with Catherine, whereby she undertook to restore the old constitution by force of arms, but, at the same time, solemnly promised to respect the integrity of Poland. Her hands, however, were for the moment tied, for, in 1787, the Porte, goaded to frenzy by the annexation of the Crimea, had declared war on Russia, and, in the following year, Gustavus III. of Sweden, renewing an ancient connection between that country and Turkey, joined in the war against Catherine. By August, 1790, Sweden had been disposed of, but it was not until a year later that the Empress of Russia was able to extricate herself from the war with Turkey. By this time Catherine had won for Russia a notable position among European Powers, and since the First Partition of Poland Russia had scarcely ever looked back. But the events in Poland now caused Catherine to turn revengeful eyes upon that country. Her ambitious scheme for increasing her territory at the expense of Turkey was temporarily shelved. Land in Poland was no less desirable than land in the Balkan

Peninsula, and its acquisition would enable Catherine to feed her vengeance against the former country. She, accordingly, made up her mind to move her armies so soon as possible against Poland, and to annex another large slice of its territory.

The outbreak of the French Revolution gave her the necessary opportunity, for Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette were soon appealing for help to their brother monarchs, and their cries for assistance rang loud in the ears of the rulers of Prussia and Austria. The Emperor of Austria was the brother of the queen of France, though this factor weighed with him less than might have been expected, and, for some time, his attitude of apparent indifference to the sufferings of his sister and brother-in-law roused the wonder of all Europe. The King of Prussia showed far more eagerness to intervene; and when, shortly afterwards, Leopold II. became fully awake to the danger which threatened every crowned head in Europe, a *rapprochement* between Prussia and Austria took place. In the discussions which ensued, the question of Poland thrust itself into prominence. Neither of the two paladins, however, could bring himself to trust his ally, and it was advisable for each to bind the other to a promise of non-interference in Poland. To this

end an agreement was arrived at in the summer of 1791, by which each promised to undertake nothing against the territorial status of Poland, while mutually guaranteeing the present possessions of both Austria and of Prussia. By the autumn of 1791, the entreaties of the French king and queen were strengthened by the anti-Austrian action of the French Assembly. Reluctantly, Leopold II. came to the conclusion that war was inevitable, and opened negotiations with the King of Prussia to that end and, on February 7, 1792, the agreement of the previous year was ratified by a formal treaty between the two monarchs.

By this time Frederick William had begun to count the cost of a war with France and was thinking of the desirability of another portion of Poland. The Emperor avoided committal ; but almost before the ink upon this document was dry, Frederick William was tempted by the prospect of a further slice of Poland on condition that he would join Austria in a war against France. The offer was made by Catherine, and the perfidious Frederick William rose at the bait, forgetful not only of his treaty with Leopold, but of that with Poland in 1790, and of his congratulations to that country in the following year. On March 12, 1792, Frederick William wrote a confidential letter to his Ministers on the affairs of Poland, which

places his intentions beyond dispute. "Russia," he said, "is not far from the idea of a new partition. It would, in truth, be the best means of restricting the power of the King of Poland—whether he be hereditary or elective. But I doubt whether we can find for Austria a suitable indemnity, or whether the Elector of Saxony, after such a diminution of power, would still accept the throne of Poland. Nevertheless, if Austria can be indemnified, the Russian plan will always be the most advantageous for Prussia. It is well understood that we should gain all the left bank of the Vistula, and that we should be thus perfectly secure on that frontier, which it has hitherto been so difficult for us to protect. Such is my opinion with reference to Poland." As a German historian truly remarked, this letter was the death sentence of Poland.

The trend of events now helped the King of Prussia in the task of dragging Austria with him to war. In March, 1792, the Emperor Leopold died—an event which was to be the misfortune of Poland, for Leopold was really averse from war with France, and was undoubtedly opposed to a further dismemberment of Poland. His son Francis, a boy of twenty-two, at once came under the thumb of Frederick William. Within a few weeks he committed himself to a policy of war against

France—a war in which Prussia was to be rewarded at the expense of Poland, while Austria was to seek reward elsewhere. And it was Austria who applied the spark to the train which had been prepared. An ultimatum was dispatched to France, which was ill received by the leaders of the Revolution in Paris, and, on April 20, 1792, they compelled the king to declare war against his nephew, Francis I., King of Hungary and Bohemia.*

Catherine of Russia had exhibited a violent animosity against the French Revolution, which was, perhaps, partly sincere. But, even at the time, her animosity was suspected of originating in a desire to have a free hand in dismembering Poland by dispatching to a distance the armies of Austria and Prussia. Such suspicion has been converted into a certainty by the recent publication of some of her correspondence. In a letter, dated June 21, 1791, to Professor Grimm, one of her philosopher correspondents, she thus explained her policy: "I am breaking my head to make the Cabinets of Berlin and Vienna intervene in the affairs of France. I wish to see them plunged in some very complicated question in order to have my hands free. I have so many enterprises unfinished. . . . It is necessary that these two Courts should be occupied in order that they may

* Francis had not yet been elected Emperor.

not prevent me from bringing them to a good end." This interesting document throws much light on Catherine's motives. She wished Prussia and Austria out of the way at a critical moment. She formed, therefore, the most cynical design of embroiling those two Powers in war with France, and, when they were fully engaged with their armies in that quarter, she intended to avail herself of the opportunity of seizing for herself alone just so much of Polish territory as she wished.*

The situation existing, therefore, in the spring of the year 1792 was as follows:—The King of France was in the hands of a revolutionary Assembly, and all the monarchs of Europe stood aghast at the trend of affairs. Of the three sovereigns of Central Europe, Frederick William of Prussia had at first displayed considerable zeal for the cause of the French royal house, but his enthusiasm had cooled into prudence; he looked for an indemnity for his necessary outlay; and Poland seemed the least formidable bystander from whom compensation could be extorted. As regards Austria, the new ruler, the young Francis, was something of a nonentity. Without any political experience and of very ordinary intelligence, he was of a weak and nervous

* Lord Eversley, "The Partitions of Poland," p. 76.

disposition. At first he seems to have been, like his father, averse from interference in Poland; but the germ of territorial aggrandisement was even then at work, and was later to infect his policy with virulence. As for Catherine, her motives are not absolutely clear. Her attitude towards the new constitution of Poland has been described by historians in terms ranging from "contemptuous tolerance" to "furious consternation." It is certain, however, that the treaty concluded between Poland and Frederick William II. roused her to anger, and it is immaterial whether her determination further to dismember Poland had its origin in a spiteful desire for vengeance on that country or in a genuine alarm lest Poland, under a hereditary dynasty, might once more become a considerable Power. The salient factor is, that by the beginning of 1792 she had definitely made up her mind to carve a further slice out of the already dismembered Poland, and was only delaying active operations until Austria and Prussia were definitely embroiled in their adventure against France. The King of Prussia had made up his mind that Poland was to reimburse him by a cession of territory for his share in the French war; and Catherine, though she had at first intended to do the plundering alone, had to offer Frederick William a prospective share in

order to induce him to take the field. So far as Poland was concerned, there were to be two robbers abroad.

In April, 1792, Austria and Prussia gave orders for their armies to prepare for the invasion of France, and Catherine, at the same time, directed her armies—one of which, fresh from the Turkish war, was to operate from the Danube, while the other was to advance from the north—to carry out the invasion of Poland. This order was issued on the 8th April, and eight days later the Polish Diet met to decide upon the measures to be taken to resist the unwarrantable aggression of Russia. All that Poland now had to depend upon was a small, ill-provided army of 46,000 men, to cope with the Russian armies of more than double that strength. There was no money in the Treasury, nor any warlike stores in the arsenals. But at this time the treaty with the King of Prussia was little more than twelve months old, and an envoy was now sent express to Berlin to claim the assistance stipulated by that document. Within a few days the messenger returned empty-handed. Frederick William repudiated such promises as he had made, and declined to defend a constitution which "had never had his concurrence." A month later he set the seal on royal perfidy.

He issued a manifesto announcing to all the world his intention of invading Poland. To cover his treachery he assigned as the reason for his contemplated action the alleged spread of revolutionary principles in Poland, and piously declared his intention of suppressing these dangerous French doctrines. Contemptible as was his conduct, Frederick William contrived to render it even more odious by a nauseating display of hypocrisy. In the announcement in which he stated that his troops were about to invade Poland, he spoke of his desire "to give real proofs of affection and regard" for his victim.

Even before this act of villainy had been advertised, the Austrian ruler, on his part, was beginning to show signs of wishing to join in the scramble for territory, for which the holy war against the demagogues of France seemed a sufficient excuse. Francis, however, had no designs against Poland, but he was prepared to condone any robbery of that nation's territory by Frederick William provided that he himself could exchange Belgium (or the Austrian Netherlands, as it was called) for Bavaria. With a naïveté which is refreshing amidst the organised wickedness of the Austro-Prusso-Russian intrigue, he now called upon Russia to render assistance in the war with France, in accordance with a

recent treaty. Catherine sent a blandly courteous reply. She patronisingly extolled Francis for opening his career with operations in such a noble cause as the salvation of France, and expressed her fears lest the deplorable action of that country might seduce Poland from the path of virtue. Duty might, perhaps, compel her to intervene for the welfare of the latter State. She could, of course, she pointed out, call upon Francis to assist her in accordance with treaty stipulations. But, realising that he was occupied to the full, she magnanimously waived her treaty rights. She knew her duty, and would do it—even if it necessitated ploughing her lonely Polish furrow alone. Such was the tenor of Catharine's ironical reply. It was a perfect exemplar of statecraft, and a masterpiece in snubs.

It was on April 8th, 1792, that Catherine ordered her armies to invade Poland. But she was shrewd enough not to rely upon military operations alone. A country which had shown such unmistakable signs of regeneration as Poland had done might well be stiffened into offering a bitter resistance against wanton aggression. On the other hand, as Catherine well realised, a house divided against itself cannot stand; and, on her suggestion, the three Polish con-

spirators who had approached her at St. Petersburg, formed a so-called confederation at the little town of Targowitz, in the Ukraine, after coöpting ten other renegades as despicable as themselves. This confederation demanded the repeal of the Constitution of May 3, 1791, and claimed to form the representative and legal assembly of the country. By this time Catharine had delivered, through her minister at Warsaw, a formal declaration of war against Poland. Nevertheless, the Diet met the crisis with dignity and firmness. The army was dispatched to the frontier, with the idea, apparently, of fighting delaying actions with the invaders until the king could come to their assistance with the reserves. For this purpose the male population was called to arms, and Stanislas was given *carte blanche* in arranging the defence of the country; after declaring him Dictator so long as the war lasted, the Diet dissolved so as to leave the executive a free hand.

The campaign opened on May 18th, when the southern Russian army crossed the south-eastern frontier of Poland, moving in three columns, each over 20,000 strong. The nobility in Poland showed great enthusiasm for the national cause, many of them raising regiments in their districts and equipping them at their own expense. This

display of patriotism was indeed counterbalanced not only by lack of tactical skill on the part of some of the leaders, but by actual treachery on the part of other higher officers; nevertheless, the campaign, brief though it was, was creditable to the Poles. Their army was under the command of Prince Poniatowski, nephew of the king, who was destined to become, twenty years later, a marshal of France. The bulk of the Polish field army appears to have been concentrated in the south-east; but it consisted only of about 20,000 men of all arms, and was thus quite outnumbered by the Russians in this quarter of the theatre of war. Nevertheless, the invaders were skilfully retarded, and at Polonna they were repulsed with over 3,000 casualties. About this time the command of the Polish field army passed into the hands of the celebrated patriot Thaddeus Kosciuszko, who had served as a volunteer in the American army against England in the War of Independence. Possessed of dauntless courage, he was the only commander on the Polish side with any real military experience; but the task imposed upon him was too severe. With only 4,000 men he endeavoured to hold the line of the Bug at Dubienka, and, though outnumbered by at least five to one, he held his ground for five days; and when the Russian

commander endeavoured to cut off the retreat of the Polish army, his forces were very roughly handled.

Unfortunately for the Poles, such troops as they had in the north-east were quite unable to stay the powerful northern Russian army, which pushed on almost unopposed to Vilna, though the defenders managed to make good their escape through the Lithuanian marshes. Both the Polish armies now converged upon Warsaw, and were prepared to risk all in a general engagement. In spite of an oath he had taken to defend the nation and the constitution with his life, Stanislas had never joined the army, nor even left Warsaw. He was not the stuff of which martyrs are made and had no wish to be identified with a hopeless struggle. After urgent and fruitless appeals to Austria, France and England, he advised the troops to lay down their arms. The king was obliged to annul the constitution which promised to do so much for the country, and was even constrained to dismiss his nephew Prince Poniatowski, and to hand over the army to the Russian General Branicki, a renegade Pole. Most of the Polish officers thereupon threw up their commissions and fled to Saxony. The Confederation of Targowitz was now recognised as the Government of

the country, and by the beginning of August Poland was at Catherine's mercy.

Catherine had now to decide what she would do with the unfortunate country which she had once again brought to its knees. It is probable that, in spite of her agreement with the King of Prussia, she would have preferred to retain the spoil exclusively for herself; and the fact that Frederick William was embroiled in war with France may have seemed an opportune moment for Catherine to repudiate her former bargain. On the other hand, the very fact that Frederick William was at war had necessitated the mobilisation of the Prussian army, and he was certainly not the class of monarch to carry on a holy war in the west while, in the east, his share of plunder was in danger. The Empress of Russia was far too shrewd to overlook the possibility of Frederick William appearing in Poland at the head of a large force, in the rôle of the saviour of Poland from Russian aggression—a mission in which he might easily have the sympathy, if not the active assistance, of Austria. Catherine, therefore, determined to make a virtue of necessity and to honour the bill which Frederick William was certain to present to her.

Nevertheless, had Catherine determined to

stand out, she might have put forward a plausible excuse for annulling her agreement with the King of Prussia. Frederick William's part of the bargain had been that he was to take the offensive, with Austria, against the French revolutionary Government. But when this condition was made, it seems to have been taken for granted that the Prussian and Austrian monarchs were to be successful. This was considered practically a certainty, for when France declared war on Austria her military organisation was at a low ebb. Many of the most effective regiments during the last period of the monarchy had consisted of foreigners. These had either been disbanded or had crossed the frontier to recruit the forces which were assembling to take part in the invasion of France. Above all, the officer class had practically ceased to exist with the emigration of the French *noblesse*. The army of new France, shorn of these elements, was a disorderly, turbulent and undisciplined mob, whose fate at the hands of the ordered legions of Austria and Prussia no sane observer could doubt.

The first events of the war were, indeed, such as to confirm this impression, for they were disastrous and disgraceful to France. The Austrian province of Belgium was invaded, but at the first

contact with a much inferior Austrian detachment, four thousand French so-called soldiers fled in panic, without firing a shot. Similar panics happened elsewhere, and it seemed impossible that the French could stand up against disciplined troops. But the unexpected is of frequent occurrence in war. On the 20th September—the very day on which France first declared herself a republic—the new French regiments checked the Prussian army at Valmy and compelled its retreat—60,000 Prussians, trained in the school of the Great Frederick, heirs to the glory of the Seven Years' War, and universally esteemed the best troops in Europe. Within a few weeks the French surged forward into Belgium, completely defeated the Austrians and compelled them to withdraw from the country.

After the humiliation of Valmy the lofty zeal of those chivalrous supporters of monarchy, Frederick William and Francis, quickly subsided, and their thoughts, by one accord, flew to the question of indemnity for their efforts—fruitless and ignoble though these had been. Both States intended to be paid for their services, but their failure in the war rendered the acquisition of French territory chimerical, not to mention the fact that there were obvious objections to purloining the dominions of a sovereign whose cause

they were espousing. Compensation must, therefore, be sought elsewhere. Frederick William could face the matter philosophically; he had Catherine's promise of a slice of Poland; and he had at hand an army—though a beaten one—with which he could jog her memory should she show signs of forgetfulness. With the Emperor the case was soon on a different footing. Within a few days of the conference Belgium was lost, and the proposal of receiving Bavaria in exchange for that province naturally collapsed. Francis now thought that Poland might reasonably be called upon to compensate him for his loss, and addressed Catherine on December 23rd to that effect. The Empress of Russia, however, thought she had shown sufficient liberality in admitting one partner to share the plunder, and refused to consider the proposal. Francis was, therefore, left somewhat in the position of a yokel who has been led into backing his luck by an expert thimblerigger and his confederate. Ignoring him altogether, Catherine and Frederick William entered into a secret treaty for the partition of rather less than half of what now remained of Poland. Austria was, indeed, too occupied in France, for she was unable to abandon the war, leaving the Austrian Netherlands in the hands of the French, in order to support

effectively her claims for indemnity. And neither Prussia nor Russia saw any reason for admitting her to share in the solemn duty of stamping out Jacobinism at Warsaw.

The King of Prussia realised that in such delicate work delays were dangerous. The treaty was signed at St. Petersburg on January 23rd, 1793; but long before that, and even before the first draft of the treaty had been drawn up, Frederick William had begun to withdraw part of his army from the Rhine. These forces were reinforced by fresh levies from Silesia, and so prompt had Frederick been, that a Prussian army, under General Möllendorf, crossed the Polish frontier, in four columns, from Silesia and East Prussia on the 14th of January, 1793—nine days before the formal signature of the treaty between Catherine and the Prussian king. Two days later Frederick William published a hypocritical manifesto, announcing his intention of saving Europe by stamping out revolutionary doctrine in Poland. General Möllendorf's troops relieved the Russian regiments which were temporarily occupying the districts earmarked for Prussia. Scarcely any opposition was met with, except on the part of Dantzig. There the council and citizens offered to surrender on condition that their ancient constitution should

be preserved; that the fortifications should remain in possession of the municipality; and that they should be garrisoned by local troops. The terms were refused and Dantzig was blockaded until April 8th, when it opened its gates.

The Second Partition of Poland had now been effected. Prussia gained the long-coveted towns of Dantzig and Thorn and the districts of Posen, Kalisch and Plock, making an area of some 15,000 square miles, with a population of over 1,000,000. Russia obtained an area more than four times as great, with a population nearly three times greater than that brought under Prussian rule. These two shares accounted for about one-half of the then existing area of Poland. The residue now left to her was to remain nominally independent, but, in reality, in a state of vassalage to Russia. In this transaction Austria had been overreached and treated with contempt. The new partition of Poland was not only a serious blow to her pride, but was, strategically, objectionable. Russia now marched with the dominions of Austria, and the buffer State, to which the latter had attached great importance, had ceased to exist.

Not content with having committed an act of absolute brigandage, the Empress of Russia, for some reason or other, was keenly desirous

of having her action formally sanctioned by the Polish Government. The unfortunate Stanislas had written to Catherine, begging that he might be allowed to resign a position which he could no longer honourably fill, but he received a curt reply to the effect that it was his duty to serve the interests of Russia by remaining. A strong hint was included in the missive regarding the personal danger which any act of abdication might bring upon him. Further, he was ordered to repair from Warsaw to Grodno, where the Diet was to open on June 17th. This assembly was packed with Catherine's creatures; bribery was resorted to on a scale even more profuse than usual; and a patriotic minority, which had secured election in spite of Russian manipulation, was, at first, overawed by the presence of Russian troops. But, carefully packed though it had been, the Diet opened with an outburst of patriotic ardour, and the Russian ambassador was constrained to have recourse to open coercion. He confiscated the property of the most prominent malcontents, and went so far as to seize the persons of seven deputies, who were deported to Silesia. Even this brazen display of intimidation failed to daunt the deputies. They persisted in their refusal to sanction the dismemberment of their country, and called upon the king to refuse

his assent, crying out that they would follow him into exile if need be. Stanislas, however, had no longing for Siberia. He pointed out the futility of resistance; the Diet was eventually brought to his way of thinking; and on July 23rd a treaty was signed with Russia, by which that country received legal possession of the provinces it had seized.

Prussia now insisted upon a similar acknowledgment of her legal rights to the plunder she had garnered in. But even a packed Diet, voting under the very bayonets of foreign soldiers, must turn at last. The pretensions of Prussia were bitterly resisted; and the Diet—displaying a credulity which seems ingrained in the Polish character—actually appealed to Catherine for protection. Honour among thieves was, however, the policy of the Russian Empress and she sent peremptory injunctions to the Diet to comply with the Prussian demands. The Diet met on September 23rd, enclosed in its normal ring-fence of Russian troops; the Russian commander occupied the royal chair; and the deputies were informed that they would not be allowed to leave the building until the treaty was signed. In this crisis, as a cynical writer remarks, "the deputies took the most dramatic and startling course that was possible for a

Polish assembly; they held their tongues." This *impasse* lasted until three o'clock on the following morning, when the suggestion was made that silence might be construed as assent. The Russian ambassador read again his mistress's instructions. Not a word was spoken, and by this inarticulate decision Prussia *ipso facto* became the legal owner of her second slice of Poland on September 25th, 1793.

CHAPTER X

"FINIS POLONIÆ"—THE THIRD PARTITION

THE shame of the second surrender of national territory sank deep into the soul of the Polish people. At first great hopes were placed in revolutionary France. After the Second Partition the refugees had sought shelter in Leipzig, and appeals were made to the new Republic in the West for assistance against the aggression of the monarchs of Central Europe. But, to the profound disappointment of the Poles, their country, in French eyes, was regarded as the embodiment of aristocratic influence, and the appeal fell on deaf ears. Even the Powers which were most hostile to Prussia and Russia would give no assistance to the Poles. Austria had refused to assent to the partition of 1793, but this was from no love of Poland, and her abstinence had begun to stimulate her appetite for another slice. Turkey had not yet recovered from the exhaustion of war, and was unwilling to provoke a quarrel with Russia. Some assistance might be looked for from Sweden, but Sweden could

not engage Russia and Prussia combined, and there was always a strong pro-Russian party among the Swedish aristocracy.

Nevertheless a wave of patriotic fervour swept over Poland. The treatment meted out to the Polish army by the emissaries of Catherine fanned the flame. The great bulk of the Polish regiments were disbanded and cast adrift, and although volunteering for the Russian service was permitted, and even encouraged, scarcely any availed themselves of the opportunity. The discontented officers and men precipitated a rising, in which the people, maddened by the national dishonour and the loss of Polish territory, enthusiastically joined.

The patriot Thaddeus Kosciusko was, at the time, living in retirement at Dresden, but, on hearing of the rising of his countrymen, he hastened to Cracow with a brigade of volunteers. There he assumed command of all the Polish forces after attending mass at the Church of the Capuchins, where the prior blessed the Polish cause and solemnly consecrated the arms of the patriots to the cause of God. He issued a manifesto summoning the people to arms, and announced that he would assume the office of Dictator until a formal Government should be established. "Furnish men capable of bearing

arms," he wrote. " Do not refuse the necessary provisions of bread, biscuit, etc. Send horses, shirts, boots, cloth, and canvas for tents. . . The last moment is arrived, in which despair, in the midst of shame and reproach, puts arms into our hands. Our hope is in that scorn of death which can alone ameliorate our lot and that of our posterity." Remaining a week at Cracow, he was busy organising the forces which responded to his appeal. These consisted of the country squires, the citizens of Cracow, and crowds of peasants armed with scythes and pikes. The greater landed gentry, as a whole, looked upon the popular movement with suspicion, and showed their aversion by holding aloof. In justice to them, it must be remembered that their large estates were hostages to fortune, for the seizure of their lands by Catherine in case of disaster to the national movement was practically a foregone conclusion.

On April 29th, 1794, Kosciusko took the field, and with a force of some 4,000 men, at least one half of whom had no weapons other than the scythes which they had carried from their farms, encountered a Russian army of about the same size under General Thomasson, on May 4th at Raclawitz. Ill-disciplined and poorly equipped though they were, the peasant

patriots of Poland swept away the Russians by the impetuosity of their attack. The Russian guns were charged, the gunners being literally mown down by their pieces, and General Thomasson was forced to retreat with great loss. But though Kosciusko remained master of the field, the disorder which is ever rampant in undisciplined armies in the after-hour of victory, compelled him to renounce all idea of pursuit and to fall back towards Cracow. Here he was, perforce, obliged to remain inactive for two months. The abstention of the great landowners compelled him to rely almost entirely upon the voluntary offerings of an impoverished people; and though the middle classes and the lower orders responded to his appeals with conspicuous and pathetic loyalty, their offerings were not of a form readily adaptable as an exchange. Church bells, furniture and even gold and silver plate from monasteries have their inconveniences when used as a currency for the purchase of supplies, or the payment of the rank and file. Nevertheless, in spite of these drawbacks, the manning of Kosciusko's army went on apace. Thousands flocked to his standard, and as the news of his victory at Raclawitz spread through the country, many Polish officers and soldiers, incorporated in the Russian forces, deserted and joined the national cause. By the

middle of June Kosciusko found himself at the head of 140,000 men, of whom 11,000 at least were regulars.

Warsaw now threw in its lot with the patriotic cause. The Russian commandant of that city, alarmed by the news of the rapid growth of Kosciusko's army, became distrustful of the Polish garrison. As a precautionary measure he first occupied the castle and other points of vantage with Russian soldiers; but being weakened by having to detach troops to deal with some insurgents, he resolved to disarm all Polish troops within the city. The successful carrying out of a military measure of such a nature demands, above all things, secrecy in the preliminary arrangements. The execution of it must come as a surprise, for the dishonour of disarmament is keenly felt by soldiers and is certain to be resisted. In this case rumours of the intended action of the commandant got about, and the insurrectionary leaders resolved to anticipate it. On the night of April 16th the Polish garrison and the citizens flew to arms, and after two days of desperate street fighting, the Russians were defeated with a loss of over 4,000 men, the Polish casualties being scarce one-tenth of that number. The Russian commandant, with the remainder of his troops, succeeded in escaping from the town,

and took refuge in a Prussian camp in the vicinity. He had shown marked incapacity in dealing with the rising; his military arrangements had been faulty in the extreme; and his chief anxiety, when the outbreak first revealed itself, had been to ensure the prompt dispatch of his furniture and mistress to Russia. The citizens of Warsaw now signed the new Confederation, to which the king gave in his adhesion. Practically, however, Stanislas was deprived of his authority, and all Warsaw recognised Kosciusko as the commander-in-chief.

After the fall of Warsaw the outbreak became general throughout Poland. The news of the insurrection was the signal for a rising in Lithuania. The citizens of Vilna flew to arms on the night of April 23rd, and massacred or made prisoners nearly all the Russian garrison. Similar scenes took place at Grodno. The insurrection now spread rapidly through all the Palatinates. The entire Polish army declared for Kosciusko; regiments which had entered the Russian service deserted *en masse* and ranged themselves under his colours. After the fall of Warsaw the Russians were compelled to evacuate Poland, leaving Kosciusko master of practically all the country. He had, by this, been invested with dictatorial powers. But though he employed such powers, now, as hitherto, solely for the good of his country,

his efforts were discounted by a lack of political sagacity. In all his proclamations he displayed the true credulity of the Pole. He persistently indicated Russia as the sole irreconcilable enemy. Prussia he looked upon as a neutral and Austria as a potential friend. His eyes were soon to be opened to the real state of affairs.

As might have been expected, Catherine of Russia was infuriated at the turn which affairs in Poland had taken, and she made up her mind to bring about the complete and final dismemberment of that country. The time was not unfavourable, for the Empress was not as yet definitely committed to actual war with Turkey; and Austria and Prussia—whom she proposed to admit as sharers in the spoil—had grown weary of their French adventure, and were quite ready to utilise their armies to other and easier ends. Frederick William indeed required but little inducement, and turned a ready ear to the counsels of his advisers, who urged that his presence in Poland at the head of an army was of supreme importance. But though Prussia was really exhausted by having to maintain two armies—one in the West and the other in Poland—for a time the Prussian King declined to go so far as to make a separate peace with France and to devote his whole energies to

Poland. But after a few months his scruples were soothed away and his conscience regained its normal elasticity. His advisers pointed out that if Prussia wished to have a decisive voice in the fate of Poland, she must occupy, without delay, the territories which she desired to retain. Possession, they urged, was the most important factor in diplomacy. This decided Frederick William. Without the knowledge of the Allies, he entered into peace negotiations with the Government of France, and, what was an act more treacherous still, he continued to pocket British subsidies paid over to him for the express purpose of his campaign in the West. Over a million pounds had been sent him by the British Government. The whole of this large amount was expended in paying and feeding Prussian troops, engaged, not in putting down the French Revolution, but in stifling the outbreak in Poland and in bringing about its final dismemberment. It need hardly be said that no part of the money, diverted from the purpose for which it was paid, was ever repaid to the British Government. A more dishonourable transaction it would not be easy to imagine.*

The Prussian troops invaded Poland at several points, and on June 3rd Frederick William arrived

* Lord Eversley, "The Partitions of Poland," p. 189.

near Cracow and took personal command of the Prussian army, with the intention of effecting a union with a Russian force in front of that city. Kosciusko was in Cracow with a force of some 17,000 men, of whom, however, at least half were untrained peasants, armed merely with scythes. To prevent the union of his enemies, Kosciusko issued from Cracow against the Russian division at Szczekocina. He was not, however, aware of the proximity of the Prussians, and since the combined forces of his enemies amounted to 26,000 men and 124 guns, Kosciusko was defeated. The Poles had fought with desperate valour, but at the close of day Kosciusko's ill-armed peasants broke in all directions, and the Polish commander fell back with the remnant of his army to Gora, a town about ten leagues south of Warsaw, where he entrenched himself. He had left over 1,000 dead and eight guns upon the battlefield, and, what was more serious, four out of the six best Polish generals had been placed *hors de combat*. On the 15th June Cracow surrendered to the Prussians.

This Prussian success was by no means pleasing to the other two conspirators. Catherine had not yet made her final settlement with Turkey, and the avowed intention of Frederick William to add Cracow to his dominions was by no means

to the liking of the politicians of Austria; so much so, that it is commonly believed that the Austrian minister, Thugut, actually contrived the defeat of the Allies at Tourcoing, near Lille, in order that the Emperor Francis II. might be induced to abandon the Low Countries and devote his energies to territorial aggrandisement in Poland. Be this as it may, early in June Francis II. turned his back upon the West, encouraged in this step by Catharine, who wished to use him as a counterpoise to the ambitious designs of the King of Prussia. Having quitted his army he returned to Vienna, and on June 30th ordered the issue of a proclamation to the effect that, to avert the danger likely to arise in Galicia from the disturbances in Poland, he was about to send troops into the latter country. An Austrian army corps of 17,000 troops accordingly marched on Brest-Litovsk and Dubnow. As for Russia, Catherine had already dispatched a few thousand troops—all that she could gather together—from St. Petersburg or from the frontier garrisons; but on June 28th, having made a final settlement with Turkey, she sent word to Suvórrov to advance with all speed from the Dniester. Catherine was determined that Poland was now to be, for ever, blotted out. As she put it, " the time has come, not only to extinguish

to the last spark the fire that has been lighted in our neighbourhood, but to prevent any possible rekindling of its ashes."

When Kosciusko threw himself into Warsaw he was not immediately followed by Frederick William, for it was not for fully a fortnight after his victory that the King of Prussia advanced northwards. To Kosciusko the respite was invaluable. It enabled him to rally the broken remnants of his army; to add to its numbers by the inclusion of fresh drafts; and to quell the fierce dissensions which had broken out. Loud cries of treachery had been raised, and the differences and suspicions so characteristic of the Poles, broke out with peculiar violence. Radicals, moderates, nobles, nationalists, and pro-Russians all added their voices to the clamour the more democratic aiming at a Reign of Terror, and those with a stake in the country inclining to a policy of moderation. It was all that Kosciusko could do to restore order or even the semblance of it; favouring the moderate party, he came instantly under suspicion of those of more advanced views. The nobles resented what they considered the affectation displayed by Kosciusko in his ostentatious wearing of peasant's dress, while the serfs were discontented at not receiving emancipation—a boon which Kosciusko withheld

through fear of the nobles. By stern measures, however, he prevailed, and set himself to the more congenial task of defending the city. He had with him some 17,000 soldiers, and to these he added some 10,000 to 12,000 from the mob. The city was, practically speaking, without permanent fortifications, but in the breathing space allowed by the dilatory Frederick William the citizens had been frantically digging trenches round the place. A strong position had been prepared by the time that the Prussians, towards the middle of July, arrived with 25,000 men and 180 guns, exclusive of a Russian division of 16,000 men and 74 guns, and a covering army of 11,000 more.

Although strongly urged by his advisers to make an immediate attack upon the trenches hastily thrown up by the inhabitants of Warsaw, Frederick William procrastinated, and the Prussian army paid Warsaw the compliment of sitting down before it, and of undertaking regular siege operations. On the 2nd August the Prussian king called upon the place to surrender, sending a *parlementaire* to Stanislas with that object. But the Polish king replied, truly enough, that he was powerless in the matter, and contented himself with deprecating some savage threats which Frederick William had sworn to put into execution should the garrison prove obstinate.

The siege was, therefore, protracted; and, although some minor successes crowned the Prussian arms, Frederick William, to the astonishment of the Poles, hurriedly broke up his camps, on the 6th September, and departed in haste, leaving behind his sick and wounded and a large portion of his baggage. The reason for Frederick's retreat was the insurrection of some Poles in the newly acquired Prussian province of Posen. Fearing lest he might find himself between two fires, the King of Prussia retreated towards that region.

This was Kosciusko's last great victory. The arrival of strong Russian forces, and, not less, the incurable dissensions of the Poles themselves, brought the end near. The Russian general, Suvórrov, recalled from the Turkish frontier, had entered Volhynia with the bulk of the army which had been collected for a possible campaign against the Turks, and directed his march upon Warsaw. So quickly had he travelled that on September 15th he arrived at Brest-Litovsk, after a march of 370 miles in little over three weeks. Three days later he utterly defeated a Polish army on the banks of the Bug; and out of a force of some 10,000 men the Poles lost 6,000 men and thirty guns. Ere this bloody day for Poland, another Russian army had been assembling in Lithuania, and before its advance

the Poles melted away; everywhere, in fact, the Polish defence was crumbling in ruins. Kosciusko, however, made one final effort. Suvórrov having effected a junction with Prince Repin, who was advancing from Grodno to Warsaw, Kosciusko hastened to oppose them. But he was induced to divert his march to deal with the Russian army of General Fersen, which had taken part in the siege of Warsaw and had retreated, though not in company with the Prussians. At Maciejowice the two forces came in collision, on the 10th October. Kosciusko waited in vain for expected reinforcements, and the Russians, irritated by their humiliation at Warsaw, attacked the Poles with inexpressible fury. The result was the utter defeat of Kosciusko's army. When the fate of the day hung doubtful, Kosciusko, putting himself at the head of a picked body of cavalry, dashed into the thickest of the fight. Three horses were killed under him, and, bleeding from several wounds, he was taken prisoner. For some time he lay as if dead, and, on recovering consciousness, he is said to have exclaimed : " *Finis Poloniæ* ! "

Consternation reigned in Warsaw when the news of the disaster reached the city. The revolutionary leaders, however, resolved to defend the capital to the last. But, three weeks later,

Suvórrov stormed the fortified suburb of Praga, and after a terrible massacre of innocent non-combatants, remained master of the place. Even Suvórrov is said to have been deeply moved by the awful scene of bloodshed. This terrible catastrophe threw Warsaw itself into the depths of despair. The city was at the mercy of the conqueror, and on the 7th November it capitulated. Two days later Suvórrov, after repairing the bridge over the Vistula, which had been burnt, entered the city. Thus ended the Polish rising of 1794.

Once more Poland lay at the proud foot of the conqueror. The actual conqueror was Catherine. It was Russia to whom was due all the credit for having suppressed the Polish insurrection, for neither Austria nor Prussia had made effective contributions towards victory. The Austrian armies had not, indeed, been called upon to fire a shot, and the King of Prussia, by raising the siege of Warsaw, and by his retreat to his own frontier, had prejudiced his claim for a share of the spoil now at Catherine's disposal. The possession of Warsaw was the tangible symbol of victory. Frederick William had tried to seize it, and had ignominiously failed; whereas the Russian armies, though numerically inferior, had gained the prize. Catherine had, therefore, all the best cards in her hand.

Briefly, she decided to favour Austria at the expense of Prussia in the forthcoming partition, and, although Frederick William took the decision of the Empress of Russia with exceeding ill grace, he dared not risk the hazard of war. Prussia was, indeed, completely isolated in Europe, and neither the king nor his advisers dared even the risk of an open rupture with Russia or Austria. On January 3rd, 1795, the two latter Powers concluded their treaty, and Prussia, after holding out for nine months longer, swallowed her pride and acceded to the compact. The Prussian army was directed to withdraw from Cracow and Sandomir, and to give way to Austria; but compensation was gained in Warsaw, from which city the Russians withdrew in favour of Prussia. Poland was now blotted from the map, and Russia retired from the final worry with the largest mouthful. In the south she took what remained of Volhynia and Podlesia, thus extending her frontier to the Bug, and to the north she acquired the Baltic littoral from just north of Memel to the Gulf of Riga. The shares of Austria and Prussia will be more easily understood by a reference to the map; it is sufficient here to mention that Austria acquired Cracow, while Warsaw fell to Prussia. A touch of meanness was added to what might have else ranked as high-class robbery by the

THE
PARTITIONS OF POLAND
Statute Miles
0 50 100 200
16
20
24
56
52
Riga
KURLAND
Dünaburg
SAMOGITIA
Tilsit
Niemen
Kovno
LITHUANIA
Vilna
ERMELAND
Königsberg
Dantzig 1793
WEST PRUSSIA
EAST PRUSSIA
POMERANIA
PRUSSIA 1772
Culm
Thorn
Ostrolenka
PRUSSIA 1795
PODLACHIA
Grodno
Bialystok
Narew
Berlin
Posen
Vistula
Oder
Warthe
GREAT POLAND
WARSAW
Bug
PODLE
Brest-Litovsk
Elbe
Maciejowice
1793
Breslau
SILESIA
Pilica
AUSTRIA 1795
Lublin
Dubienka
VOLH
Cracow
Vistula
LITTLE POLAND
AUSTRIA
Przemysl
Lemberg
Zips
1772
Dniester
HUNGARY
LEGEND
Boundary of Poland in 1772, before the First Partition.
Boundaries of territories taken in the Partitions.
The dates of the various Partitions were:—
1st Partition 1772.
2nd ,, 1793.
3rd ,, 1795.
The town of Dantzig fell to Prussia in the Second Partition.

MAP 2. To face p. 192.

George Philip & Son, Ltd.

fact that Catherine annexed the archives of the great Zaluski library, while the King of Prussia purloined the contents of the treasury and the crown jewels. Poland had, indeed, but her " eyes to weep with," and so eager were the three Powers to insist on the finality of her dissolution, that a secret article was actually inserted into the Partition Treaty by which each Power bound itself never to include the very name of Poland among their territorial titles.

Everything was now signed, sealed and delivered. The conspirators had, however, an unemployed king upon their hands, for whom some form of outdoor relief was obviously called for from these protagonists of monarchical rights. Stanislas was, at the moment, in some kind of banishment at Grodno. By a euphemism characteristic of the whole transaction, he was now " permitted " to lay down the crown which he had worn since 1764. His debts at Warsaw were paid, and a pension of 200,000 ducats, chargeable jointly to the three Powers, was assigned to him. After the death of the Empress in 1796 he took up his residence in St. Petersburg, in which city he died on February 12th, 1798. Few kings have cut a sorrier figure in history than this puppet of Fortune and the ex-lover of a profligate empress.

CHAPTER XI

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PARTITIONS OF POLAND

IT is important to remember that the three partitions gave no part of the original Poland to Russia. Russia took back the Russian territory which had long before been won by Lithuania, and added the greater part of Lithuania itself, with the land immediately to the north. Poland proper—that is to say, the ancient kingdom of Poland—was divided between Prussia and Austria, and the oldest Poland of all fell to the lot of the former. Great Poland, Silesia, Pomerania, the Polish lands which had passed to the Mark of Brandenburg, once united under Polish rule, were again united under the Power from which they had gradually fallen away. Austria—or Hungary—meanwhile took the rest of the modern Chrobatia.

The more, however, the partitions of Poland are studied the more difficult is it to realise that at one period Poland had been one of the Great Powers of Europe; that it had withstood for centuries the growing power of Germanism; that

it had been the centre of Catholic reaction in the North during the period of the Counter-Reformation; and that, under John Sobieski, it was Poland that had rolled back the Turkish tide from the very walls of Vienna, and thus eliminated the possibility, and more, of the Ottoman Empire extending its western frontier to the Rhine. It is worthy, too, of remark that, of the three partitioning Powers, Prussia had formerly been in a state of vassalage to Poland; Russia once saw her capital and throne possessed by that nation; and Austria was indebted to Sobieski for the preservation of Vienna. These factors certainly do not make the disappearance of Poland from the map of Europe more easy of comprehension, and the difficulty of accounting for such deletion is increased when the consolidating tendency of the nationalities of latter-day Europe is borne in mind. Since the dismemberment of Poland, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy have been consolidated by union, and in the last-named case such union has been achieved by the expulsion of a foreign Power; while, among the lesser nations, Greece, Servia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Rumania have achieved and maintained their independence. The case of Poland is so exceptional that an enquiry into the causes of its decline and fall can scarcely fail to be of interest.

Like most of the downfalls to be recorded in history, the fate of Poland was brought about by no one particular factor upon which the student of nationality can, metaphorically, lay his finger. It was to a combination of causes, reacting one upon the other, that the downfall of Poland was due. Generally speaking, these predisposing factors can be classed as political, religious, geographical, or fortuitous; and, though this subdivision is somewhat arbitrary, and is open to the objection that it leads to some overlapping, it will be found to provide a convenient framework on to which what follows may be fitted.

As for political causes the majority of historians are agreed that the monarchical system of Poland made for instability. In earlier days the succession was to all intents and purposes hereditary in the families of the Piasts and Jagellos, but became purely elective in the persons of Henry of Valois and Stephen Batory, and in 1672, after the death of Sigismund, hereditary claim was, as such, ruled out of court. The elective system often resulted in the choice of foreign princelings, lacking any real knowledge of Polish conditions, and without any sense of permanency in the succession. These sovereigns were incapable of devising a foreign policy suitable for the development of the country, with the result that Poland

presented the appearance of a sham aristocratic republic in the midst of States in which monarchical power had grown to exceptional strength. Further, since the time of Henry of Valois, the power of the sovereign in Poland was limited by certain conditions, known as the *pacta conventa*, to which each king on his election was required to swear obedience. These were founded upon the body of privileges extorted by the nobles from the king since the time of Louis (1370–1382). Several additions were subsequently made. And inasmuch as these *pacta* are often quoted as one of the causes which combined to bring about the ruin of Poland, it will be well to examine them in some detail. The following summary contains the chief of these *pacta* :—

1. The king was not to attempt to influence the Diet in the choice of a successor.

2. He was to observe the agreements which had been made with the Dissidents.

3. No war was to be declared, nor military expeditions undertaken, without the consent of the Diet.

5. The king could not appoint ambassadors to foreign Courts.

6. In case of different opinions prevailing among the senators, he should adopt only

such as were in accordance with the laws and clearly advantageous to the nation.

7. He should be furnished with a permanent council, the members of which (sixteen in number, viz., four bishops, four palatines, and eight castellans) should be changed every half year, and should be chosen by the ordinary Diets.

8. A general Diet should be convened every two years at least.

9. The duration of each Diet was not to exceed six weeks.

10. None but a native could hold any dignity or benefice.

11. The king was neither to marry nor divorce a wife without the consent of the Diet.

Although historians have commented adversely on these *pacta conventa*, it is possible that the impartial student will maintain that the conditions given above are very similar in tenour to those by which the power of every constitutional monarch is limited to-day, and that the King of England, for example, would find no difficulty in securing the loyalty and devotion of his subjects by a scrupulous observance of most of them. At any rate, they are scarcely the class of conditions which *prima facie* would justify

the statement that they "extorted from each successive king an acknowledgment of his impotence in the State.* The truth appears to be that the *pacta conventa*, politically admirable though they seem to be, were born before their time. Prior to the year signalised by the downfall of Poland, the monarchical principle was in other countries being strengthened and centralised; and wider powers were conferred upon the king, as representing the people, in order to ensure consistency and stability to the State. This system, it is true, failed, and failed badly, in France—in the very middle of the era marked by Poland's fall—and, therefore, it might seem that Poland was not ill-advised in persisting in a limitation of monarchical power. But France was not the immediate neighbour of Poland. The adjacent Great Powers, Prussia and Russia, were notable examples of the centralisation of kingly power. Since the days of the Great Elector, Prussia owed much of its greatness to the fact that its government was, in effect, a despotism backed up by military force; while in Russia the very names of Peter the Great and Catherine II. are suggestive of nothing so much as of almost unfettered autocracy. In a word, it was, to say the least, distinctly injudicious of Poland to have devised

* "Cambridge Modern History," vol. viii., p. 521.

a monarchical system more enlightened than that in vogue within two of the three great States by which she was surrounded. Nothing could have justified the adoption of such a system but the strength derivable from strong alliances and the whole-hearted support of the other estates of the nation. But the alliances did not exist and internal co-operation was lacking.

Particularly was the latter the case with the nobles. According to the Polish laws, a noble was a person possessing a freehold estate, or one who could prove his descent from ancestors possessing such property. The members of this class could not engage in trade nor in commerce—except at the price of deprivation of the privileges of their order. As a result the most odious evils of caste prevailed; the country was full of out-at-heels squireens, who swelled the retinues of the richer aristocracy; and any fusion with the more solid and responsible classes of the community was *taboo*. Unfortunately, too, the order of nobles arrogated to itself two of the most important privileges of a citizen. They supplied the fighting force of the nation, and they alone voted at the elections for members of the Diet. The former privilege crystallised into the custom by which a nobleman alone might wear a sword; and as many of these so-called nobles had to

support themselves by the manual labour of a peasant, it was not unusual to see some of them following the plough barefooted wearing an old rusty sword tied to the body by a piece of string. The existence of the peasant-noble led to some strange anomalies. He could be, and often was, beaten. But his outraged dignity was soothed by the privilege of having a carpet under his body during the operation. And since nobility in Poland recognised no gradation in its ranks, the peasant-noble, even when bleeding from his stripes, still solemnly and sincerely believed himself the social equal of the dukes and marquises of Western feudalism.

The strong political power of the nobles was gained at the expense of the throne, and, unfortunately for Poland, a want of patriotism prevailed amongst them. Generally speaking, they had no large ideals; their views were parochial; and most of them preferred their own local and family interests to that of the nation at large. A lack of national cohesion also grew out of the system by which the more powerful nobles were allowed to maintain their own bands of retainers and to indulge in private warfare; and the existence of these private armies enabled discontented nobles to flout the legal Diet and to assemble rival confederations. Legislation in

such circumstances was bound at times to degenerate into a mere farce; and with a selfish, restless, and often discontented nobility, and a king whose authority was more circumscribed than that of his brother sovereigns, Poland was at the mercy of its neighbours.

The great change which inaugurated modern history in Central Europe is bound up with the decay of the Empire and of the Papacy; the decline of feudalism, chivalry and class interests; and the rise—more or less gradual—of the power of the people. The constitution of Poland, however, was opposed to the growth of the latter factor, for the absence of any middle class, in the true sense of the word, was characteristic of Poland, and was undoubtedly a predisposing cause of its ruin. It is true that intermediate between the nobles and the peasants came the burghers. This class had emerged from slavish subjection during the Middle Ages, and the system—originating in Italy and thence passing to France and Germany—of forming cities into bodies politic, with power to exercise municipal jurisdiction, had been introduced into Poland about 1250. The privileges of these cities were gradually increased, and the beneficial effect soon appeared in the sudden increase of population and wealth. The burghers, indeed, of the principal

free towns acquired such a degree of importance as to give their assent to treaties and to send deputies to the national assembly. A noble was not degraded by becoming a burgher, and, conversely, a burgher was capable of holding any office under the Crown. And when, during the reign of Sigismund, the nobles endeavoured to exclude the burghers of Cracow from the Diet, the king not only confirmed the right of that city to send representatives, but even decreed that the citizens were included within the class of nobles.

When, however, the succession to the crown became wholly elective, the burghers were forced to witness continual encroachments upon their privileges. The class—the nobles—which could make kings, could easily unmake burghers. These lost the right of holding landed property, except in the immediate vicinity of towns; they were not permitted to send deputies to the Diet; and were excluded from all share of the legislative authority. And since the burghers were not obliged, by the nature of their tenures, to march against the enemy, but only furnished arms and transport, they incurred the contempt of the warlike gentry. These, in the true spirit of feudal arrogance, considered all occupations—except that of war—as beneath a freeman. Other

causes, too, contributed to the decay of the burgher class. The occupation by the Turks of the northern shores of the Black Sea opposed a barrier to commerce in that direction. The Baltic came under the dominion of Sweden. The discovery of America turned the tide of commerce toward the West. To these factors were added the poor system of internal communications in Poland, the natural predilection of the Poles towards a pastoral life, and the ever-growing immigration of the Jews. In time these came to be practically the only business class in the country. In his travels through Poland, at the close of the eighteenth century, the English traveller Coxe was much impressed by the swarms of Jews. They were particularly numerous in Lithuania, where "if you ask for an interpreter, they bring you a Jew; if you come to an inn, the landlord is a Jew; if you want post-horses, a Jew procures them and a Jew drives them; if you wish to purchase, a Jew is your agent; this, perhaps, is the only country in Europe where Jews cultivate the ground." The burghers, therefore, declined, and came to have alien interests; and this failure to replace feudalism with a strong middle class was a decided misfortune for Poland.

In a country where the arrogance of the

nobles and the suppression of the burgher element effectively choked any real patriotism, it was not to be expected that love of country should distinguish a class so wretched as the Polish serfs. For serfs, or slaves, the peasants were, and the value of an estate was estimated, even as late as 1780, not by its extent, but by the number of peasants attached to it, who were transferred from one master to another like cattle. Of the peasants, those who were descended from the German immigrants of the time of Casimir the Great still enjoyed several of their old-time privileges, but the slavery of the native, or Polish, peasants was extremely rigorous. The reforms introduced by Casimir the Great to stem the tyrannical abuses of the nobility proved ineffectual against the power of that class. Peasants belonging to an individual were at the absolute disposal of their master, and had practically no security for either their property or their lives. Until 1768 the laws of Poland exacted only a fine from a lord who killed his slave, and although in that year such offence was made a capital crime, the extreme penalty was inflicted only when the murderer was taken in the act, which had to be proved by two gentlemen or four peasants. The only pleasure of the peasants was drinking on Sundays, and, since many of

the nobles enjoyed the monopoly of the sale of spirits, this recreation was, as might have been expected, pushed to undesirable limits. The generality, indeed, of Polish nobles scarcely considered the peasants as entitled to the common rights of humanity, and although since 1760 some of the more enlightened aristocrats had tentatively adopted a policy of manumission, this boon was negatived by the laws of the country. A lord might grant freedom to his slaves, but he could not entail it upon them, and his successors might again reduce them to their original state of vassalage.

In a word, the condition of the Polish peasants during the eighteenth century was undoubtedly the worst in Europe. They lived in the most abject discomfort; and their filth and misery exposed them to the horrors of epidemics, against which they could make no resistance. Of personal liberty they had none. They were forbidden to leave their villages, and the forced labour on their lords' estates left them but scanty leisure to cultivate their own diminutive plots; so that in seasons of bad harvest the mortality amongst them, from starvation alone, was frightful. Exalted patriotism from these unfortunate and degraded beings was, therefore, hardly to be expected. It is true that they rallied in thousands round

Kosciusko, and fought bravely; but it is distinctly open to question whether it was sheer love of country which fired them to these great deeds. Poland, indeed, affords the example of a country where the evolution of constitutional monarchy was not accompanied, *pari passu*, by the emancipation of the people. In England monarchical despotism had lasted until the people were sufficiently advanced to stand alone. The continuance, or, rather, the revival of this despotism in England was not entirely due—as has been contended—to the popular confidence in monarchy as such; it was more directly caused by the Wars of the Roses, which eliminated the power of the nobility by killing off its members. The great struggle for liberty was, therefore, fought out between the people and the Crown alone. Feudalism had been lopped off, and had Poland been blessed with a similar pruning her fate might well have been different from what it was.

It should be remarked, however, that, although the terms "feudal" and "feudalism" have been employed in describing the Polish national system, these terms have been used in their wide sense. Feudalism, as it existed in Western Europe, *i.e.*, the system of the tenure of land held from the Crown, and implying service to the Crown in return, was unknown in Poland. Theoretically,

the government was a republic. All men were free and equal. But only men of a certain class, *i.e.*, the nobility, were men " within the meaning of the Act," so to speak. Of the privileged full-citizens, the aristocracy had endeavoured to take the government into its hands, but in this it had been resisted by the knighthood, or military class. Finally, these two sections of the population coalesced and from the union sprang the Polish nobility. Within it all were equal. There were no titles, and the only distinction in rank depended on executive offices to which any noble could aspire. Poland was, therefore, an " aristocratic republic."

As regards the religious factor, it certainly contributed to the fate of Poland that, whereas one of her powerful neighbours was predominatingly Lutheran, and another belonged to the Greek Church, Poland herself had received her religion from Rome. The minority in that country who were of the Orthodox Church, and were numbered among the Dissidents, naturally looked for protection across the frontier. The Prussians were ready to assist the Protestants; the Russians, the members of the Greek Church. And, though Poland was, on the whole, ahead of many European States in the matter of religious toleration, the influence of the Jesuits—which was

particularly strong—led to a certain amount of persecution of non-Catholics, and to their exclusion from the service of the Crown. To the grievances thus caused, both Russia and Prussia were peculiarly sensitive. Russia aimed at being the greatest of Slavonic States, and strove to identify the interests of the Slavs with those of the Greek Church; while the kings of Prussia took their title from that part of their dominions inherited from the Teutonic Knights. Those monkish warriors had aimed at a successful crusade against the pagan Borussi on the southern shores of the Baltic, but had been deprived of their independence by the Poles, and Borussia—or East Prussia—was separated from Brandenburg, the kernel of the Hohenzollern dominions. Further, the kings of Prussia had come to be regarded as the champions of North German Protestantism, and the crusading tradition, inherited from their knightly forbears, had not completely died away. They were thus naturally hostile to Poland, which had long been the centre of militant Roman Catholicism.

Of other unfortunate factors which may be classified under the subheading "political," there was the legislative dead-weight known as the *liberum veto*. Enough has already been written of the absurdity of this feature of the constitution

to justify but a short reference to it here. Its existence was due almost entirely to the so-called "noble" class, in which a perfect passion for equality long reigned. So much so that a decision of the Diet could not be accepted as valid so long as one noble felt aggrieved or anxious at the propriety of such act. The idea that the greatest good of the greatest number was an end desirable scarcely seems to have entered into the heads of these passionate champions for equal rights. For, although it was legally possible for the Diet, in grave crises, to suspend the *liberum veto*, and to accept the decision of a majority, such expedient was very rarely resorted to.

The geographical drawbacks of Poland were serious. It had no natural frontiers—for, indeed, it was but a vast open plain, open to incursions on all sides—and across its artificial frontiers were powerful States. And scarcely less important than this was the fact that, prior to the first partition Brandenburg and East Prussia—which together formed the kingdom of Prussia—were separated by a wedge of Polish territory. The difficulty of adequately defending East Prussia had been a serious handicap to Frederick the Great in the Seven Years' War, and it was only natural that he should have determined to bridge

over the gap by gaining possession of the intervening slice of Poland at any cost. Further, the port of Dantzig and possession of the lower waters of the Vistula were indicated as a necessity for a growing State like Prussia, to which command of the Baltic was bound, sooner or later, to become essential. The Baltic is practically a *mare clausum*, and the channels uniting it with the North Sea and the outer world could be held, against Prussia, by a strong Power—as Sweden then was. In the inevitable conflict for supremacy on this inland sea a strategic position like Dantzig could not be overlooked. To Russia, too, Poland was an obstacle to the connexion with Germany, from which Russia derived a chief part of her Western teaching. From this it resulted that Russian expansion was bound to be harmful, if, indeed, not fatal to Poland. Austria was in a different case, for her traditional policy was to maintain Poland as a buffer State betwixt herself and Russia. But she subsequently showed that she was prepared to surrender this policy for actual territorial gain.

Of factors labelled fortuitous was the lack of men of talent and energy among the sovereigns of Poland. A Polish historian—Professor Bobrzynkski—thus sums up the matter: "Poland had

some vigorous rulers, such as Bolesas the Brave and Casimir the Great. Yet, whereas France had Francis I., Henry IV. and Lewis XIV.; England, Henry VIII. and Elizabeth; Spain, Charles V. and Philip II.; Austria, the Ferdinands; Sweden, Gustavus Vasa, Charles of Sudermania, and Gustavus Adolphus; Russia, Ivan and Peter—we have only a weak honest man in Sigismund I.; Sigismund Augustus, who proved a coward in all matters where action and honest conviction were required; and Sigismund III., conspiring for our distruction. The genius of Batory shone; but only for a while. He created capable men, but had not time to improve our institutions. Of our later kings, Vladislas IV. merely deceived the country, bringing it into a worse condition, though with good intentions. Of Wisniowiecki and the Saxon kings it is idle to make mention. The genius of Sobieski seemed only created for war, and contrasts in a glaring manner with the mistakes of his policy. We may stop a while to contemplate John Cassimir and Stanislas Poniatowski; but while we grant them merits, we find them wanting in capacity and energy. The history of no other country shows such a cruel fate as ours." Certainly nothing crueller than the presence on the throne of a Stanislas Poniatowski during the life of a Frederick the Great, a

Catherine II. and a Maria Theresa. The characteristics of these three have already been touched upon. Territorial aggrandisement—at another's expense—was the ruling passion of the two first named. Maria Theresa was not at first so inclined. She assented to the First Partition with a somewhat dismal reluctance. But Frederick the Great was not far from the truth when he said: "She is always in tears, but she always takes her share."

Whether the chief cause of the downfall of Poland is to be found in the gradual decadence of the country itself, or in the rapacity of its neighbours, is a question to which it is impossible to give an explicit answer. It is an enquiry as vain as an attempt to determine whether a vessel foundered because its planks started, or because the sea entered and altered its specific gravity. In each case the two factors are inseparable. It is the business of a ship to keep out the sea; if it fails it ceases to be a ship. Coxe put the matter plainly in reviewing the First Partition. He travelled through the country and thus expressed himself on his return: "The most effectual way for a State to secure its dominions is to make itself respectable by strength and unanimity, and to be prepared against attack. When a powerful people impute national disasters,

which vigour and foresight might have prevented, to the perfidy of foreign States, they only bear testimony, in more specious terms, to their own indolence, negligence and weakness of Government." And Poland is not the sole State in Europe to which this sagacious dictum can apply.

But although it has been contended that it was to a combination of causes that Poland owes its ruin, it is only right to remark that such an authority as Alison gives one cause as having solely contributed to that event.* "The ignorant impatience of taxation," wrote Alison, "did the whole." Poland being a country in which, probably from homogeneity of original race, and the absence of any distinction of rank consequent on foreign conquest, equality was really and practically established, the preservation of equal rights became the ruling passion of the people. Among these rights the most important and most valued was that of being free from taxation. No danger, however great—no calamities, however threatening—no perils, however overwhelming—could induce the Poles to submit to the smallest present burden to ward off future disaster. In the last struggle under Kosciusko

* Alison, "History of Europe," 2nd Series, vol. iv., ch. xxvi. 8.

they could, in consequence, barely oppose 25,000 men to the united armies of Russia, Austria and Prussia. The views of Alison are summarized in a sentence by Sidney Smith: "They preferred any load of infamy, however great, to any burden of taxation, however light."

CHAPTER XII

THE ERA OF NAPOLEON

HAVING gained complete possession of Poland, the three Powers who had divided up the country set themselves to implant their domination over it. In Russia, Catherine II. died in 1796, and was succeeded by her son, the Emperor Paul, who, although he was animated by sympathy towards the Poles, was not prepared to undo the work of his mother. Russia began by making efforts to force the Orthodox religion upon the Poles, inaugurated a persecution of the Jews, and compelled the peasants to submit to the rigid Russian code of laws. Prussia espoused the Protestant cause of the minority, and essayed to bring about the ruin of the *szlachta*, which was still the centre of national resistance. Austria. on her part, adopted a severe *régime* of Germanisation in Galicia.

But the spirit of independence was not yet dead in Poland, and the crowning misfortune of 1795 animated all classes with a common purpose. It was natural that, in spite of a former rebuff, great hopes should have been placed in

France; and during the summer of 1796 one of the leading figures of the national insurrection, Dombrowski, presented to the French Directory a project for raising a Polish legion to assist in the war against Austria. At that time, however, the laws of France prohibited the employment of foreign troops, but this difficulty was got over by sending the Polish troops into Lombardy, where they came nominally under the provisional Government of Italy. This was in January, 1797, and General Dombrowski soon had 5,000 men under his orders.

The Poles, however, soon began to experience the bitterness of disappointment which was to mark their relations with France. Hardly had the Polish Legion been organised when General Dombrowski suggested its employment in Austria to emancipate the Slavs and Hungarians. Bonaparte consented, but in October of that year concluded the Treaty of Campo Formio with Austria, in which no mention was made of Poland. Even when the ties uniting the Polish Legion to France became stronger, the result was the same. In 1799, when Bonaparte was made First Consul, the law forbidding the employment of foreign troops was repealed, and the Legion was taken over by France. Raised to a strength of over 15,000, it covered itself with

glory, especially in Northern Italy, in 1799, against Suvórrov; but in 1801, when the Treaty of Lunéville, concluded between France and Austria, once again brought about a brief spell of peace, the question of Poland was again left out, except for the negative stipulation, by which France engaged not to assist the Poles against their masters. Consternation reigned throughout the ranks of the Legion at the news. Soon this force, which was now becoming an inconvenience to Bonaparte, passed out of history. It was sent as part of a large French army to San Domingo in 1802, to put down a rebellion amongst the negroes. Here it was exposed to a terrible epidemic of yellow fever, and very few survived to return to Europe.

So long, however, as France was at war with any one of the Powers which had plundered Poland, the Poles still clung to the hope of recovering their independence by French aid. A further chance of gaining their end seemed to be vouchsafed them. In 1804 Bonaparte was elected Emperor of the French, and in the following year a coalition was formed against him, consisting of England, Russia, Sweden, Austria, and, later, of Prussia. Napoleon determined to endeavour to crush the coalition before it could be got into efficient working order,

and on the 1st September, 1805, his camp at Boulogne was broken up, and by the end of the month the Grand Army was in the valley of the Danube. The Austrians were crushed at Ulm. Vienna was occupied by the French in November. And on the 2nd December Austria and Russia were dealt a crushing blow at Austerlitz. The following year war broke out between France and Prussia, and on October 14th the military power of Prussia was shattered. Thus within a year the successors of Catharine II., Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa had been humbled in the dust. Austria had suffered two crushing blows, Russia had sent her army homewards at full speed, and Prussia had gone down in unrelieved disaster. It would indeed have been a phlegmatic Pole who could pretend not to see in this retribution the hand of Divine justice.

The news of Jena acted like magic on the Poles. They flew to arms and expelled the Prussians from several fortified places. Napoleon entered Posen on the 17th November, and two months later occupied Warsaw, after clearing Prussian Poland of enemy troops. Not even then were the Poles to realise that they had not yet touched bottom in the depths of disillusion. At Posen Napoleon had issued a non-

committal and non-inspiring manifesto, the tenor of which may be understood by the following brief extract :—

> "Shall the throne of Poland be re-established, and shall this great nation resume its independence? God only, Who holds in His hands the issues of all events, is the Arbiter of this great political problem."

Credulity, however, was such a marked characteristic of the Poles that even a manifesto of this nature was not sufficient to extinguish their hopes for the revival of their nation. Napoleon was shrewd enough to keep the flame alive by vague promises, which inspired them still with the belief that he intended to restore their independence. Yet another chance seemed vouchsafed to Poland. In 1807 war again broke out between France and Russia. But Napoleon was checked in the full tide of conquest by the devotion of the Russian troops. Eylau was a drawn battle; the Russians met the attacks of the French with unflinching stubbornness; and both armies remained upon their positions at the close of that bloody February 8th, 1807. And although Friedland, fought in the following June, was an unquestioned victory for the French, success had been bought at such a cost as to

make even Napoleon pause. An armistice was quickly arranged, and on the 25th June the Emperors, Alexander I. and Napoleon met at Tilsit, on a raft moored in the middle of the Niemen. The two monarchs proceeded to settle the destinies of Continental Europe without reference to the other Powers, and they abandoned their allies without scruple. Alexander gave up Prussia, who had plucked up courage to face another trial of strength with the French, while Napoleon deserted the cause of the Poles.

Thus Poland again went to the wall. The Emperor of Russia declined Napoleon's offer of the crown of that country, but in doing so he refused to listen to Napoleon's suggestion that it should, in this case, be conferred on Napoleon's brother Jerome. The Polish problem was then provisionally solved by constituting out of New East Prussia and South Prussia—mainly the ground gained by Prussia in 1793 and 1795—the Grand Duchy of Warsaw.* The King of Saxony was to be its ruler as Grand Duke, and, in that capacity, he was to enter the Confederation of the Rhine. This new Grand Duchy had a population of some three millions. Although the prospect of complete independence was as far off as ever, nevertheless Poland received substantial benefits

* It was not officially styled *Grand* Duchy until 1808.

from the intervention of Napoleon. A new constitution was granted to the Duchy. Serfdom was abolished.* The French legal code and judicial procedure were introduced. This meant not only civil equality, but a just recognition of the rights of accused persons, and the abolition of civil punishments.

Feminine influence was not without effect at this time. At Warsaw, in 1807, Napoleon was captivated by a young Polish lady, the Countess Walewska, who, however, remained deaf to the Emperor's importunities. The Polish nobility then put pressure upon her, and in a document signed by all the foremost names of Poland, the authority of Scripture was invoked. "Do you think," wrote these patriots, "that Esther abandoned herself to Ahasuerus for love? Her swooning with terror at the sight of him is the best proof that tenderness had no share in that connection. She sacrificed herself to save her people, and reaped the glory of having saved them. Would that we might say the same to your honour and happiness!" Moved by these exhortations and by the promises of Napoleon to re-establish her country, the young countess surrendered herself to her Imperial lover. It may

* In theory, but since no land was forthcoming the freemen remained practically in their old position.

be remarked that Alexander's relations with Poland contain a remarkable parallel. He, too, was passionately attached to a beautiful Polish princess, who was always begging him to re-establish Poland.

Substantial as were the benefits introduced by Napoleon, the fact yet remains that the creation of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw was eventually to result in the absorption of most of its territory by Russia rather than in the recovery of territory lost to Russia in the three partitions. Economically, too, the situation of the Grand Duchy was unfortunate. Dantzig, with the surrounding territory, had been declared a free State under Prussian and Saxon protection; but, in reality it was occupied by French troops, and the Continental System hindered the exportation of Polish timber and wheat. At the same time, war between Russia and Turkey cut off trade with the Ottoman Empire. Enormous military contributions were also called for from Poland to fill the French Treasury, and, as will readily be understood, the finances of Poland suffered considerably from all these factors. A particularly galling burden was the bestowal of twenty-seven Polish domains on Napoleon's marshals and generals. Military affairs, however, received considerable attention, for the Polish army was to be raised to 30,000 men.

Any chance of development on the part of the new Duchy was, however, interrupted by a fresh outbreak of war between France and Austria in 1809. Napoleon abandoned the pursuit of Sir John Moore and quitted Spain, partly because there was no more glory to be won there and partly because of threatening news from Austria. The Government at Vienna realised that a moment when 300,000 French troops were locked up in Spain was a favourable one to strike a blow, and on the 9th April Austria declared war on Bavaria, an ally of France. The Austrian Archduke Ferdinand invaded the Grand Duchy of Warsaw with 30,000–40,000 men, and, after a fierce battle with the Polish army, occupied Warsaw. But early in May Poniatowski took the offensive, and on the 5th, after a successful combat, occupied Gora, where the Austrians had intended to cross the Vistula. The Archduke endeavoured to make a demonstration towards Thorn, but Poniatowski led his troops up the Vistula and occupied Lublin and Sandomir, while a Russian army advanced towards Lemberg. As a result, the invaders were compelled to evacuate Warsaw and to retreat into their own country. The arrival of Napoleon in the theatre of war still further added to the discomfiture of Austria. By a series of masterly manœuvres, unsurpassed in the history

of war, he collected the scattered French forces, and in a brilliant five-day campaign (18th–22nd April) broke through the enemy's line. Vienna was occupied by the French on May 1st. Nine days later the indecisive battle of Aspern was fought. But on July 6th the French gained an unquestioned victory at Wagram—though at bloody cost. In October the Peace of Vienna was signed, by which fresh territory was torn from Austria. Of this territory four departments of Galicia, including Cracow and Sandomir, were added to the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and two were handed over to Russia. The Duchy was, therefore, extended at the cost of Austria, while Russia not only remained in possession of her former booty, but added some of Austria's original share. This arrangement has not unjustly been described as really another partition of the unfortunate Poland.

It may be admitted at once that Napoleon's interest in Poland was somewhat of a political fiction. So far was he from really working for its independence, that as early as 1809, when he was seeking to induce the Emperor of Russia to give him the hand of his young sister in marriage, he agreed not to use the terms Poland or Poles; and in 1810 a treaty was actually signed, pledging the two Powers against the restoration of the

kingdom. He was attracted to it by the fact that its occupation by French armies conduced to the isolation of Prussia; that it provided him with a first-class recruiting area; and that it formed a tangible asset which could be exchanged, if necessary, for other territory. The country was brought, indeed, to a state of general wretchedness during his occupation, and in 1811, when the deficit of the Polish Treasury amounted to twenty-one million francs, the Abbé de Pradt, Napoleon's ambassador, drew a striking picture of the condition of the Grand Duchy. "Nothing," he says, "could exceed the misery of all classes. The army was not paid, the officers were in rags, the best houses were in ruins. The greatest lords were compelled to leave Warsaw from want of money to provide their tables."

Nevertheless, the Poles still pinned their faith to the Emperor of the French, so that, when in 1812 hostilities again broke out between France and Russia, over 70,000 Poles rallied round the eagles. Under Prince Joseph Poniatowski they formed the Fifth Corps of the Grand Army when it marched into Russia; and just before the invasion, at a meeting of the Diet of the Grand Duchy, speeches were made by the express instructions of Napoleon himself declaring the reconstitution of the Kingdom of Poland. But by the time

when the Grand Army reached Vilna, the capital of Lithuania, on the 9th June, Napoleon's dupes were undeceived. In an ambiguous reply to an address there presented to him, Napoleon stated that he loved Poland, and that, had he been reigning at the time of the three partitions he would have assisted Poland with all his resources. But his language when dealing with a possible restoration was evasive and non-committal, damping even the credulous enthusiasm of his Polish audience.

Nevertheless, in spite of this unsatisfactory answer, the Poles fought with all their traditional gallantry against the hated Russians. On the 23rd June the French crossed the Niemen and commenced the invasion of Russian Poland. Into the details of this campaign, so fatal to Napoleon, it is unnecessary to enter. It is sufficient to say that the Poles bore themselves bravely in all the battles during the advance and shared all the horrors of the retreat from Moscow. In the eastward march they distinguished themselves greatly at Smolensk, Borodino and other engagements; but when at last, on the 13th December, a small and shattered remnant of the Grand Army, which had started six months before, crossed the Niemen into Prussian territory, of 80,000 Poles not more than 3,000 reached Cracow.

The Russians took possession of the city and province without much opposition.

The ruin of Napoleon's army made a profound impression in Prussia, and on the 28th February, 1813, a treaty was signed with the Emperor of Russia to declare a common war against Napoleon. The War of Liberation followed, in which 15,000 Poles, under Poniatowski, still clung to Napoleon. They formed the Eighth Corps of his army, and took part in the battles of Dresden and Leipzig. In that last great "Battle of the Nations" the French were forced to retreat, and they could not halt until they had crossed the Rhine. To complete the list of Napoleon's disasters, the same year, 1813, witnessed the overthrow of his Power in Spain, and in 1814, unable to defend the eastern frontier, he concentrated what forces he could in Champagne. Never did he display more desperate courage or more brilliant strategy, but on the 31st March the allied sovereigns made a solemn entry into Paris, and on the 11th April, 1814, Napoleon abdicated unconditionally. Misfortune had indeed dogged Poland. With a loyalty and persistence worthy of a better fate she had looked to Napoleon to retrieve her independence. But Napoleon had merely used Poland for his own ends, and had involved her in his own ruin.

After the conclusion of the war, in 1814, and the deportation of Napoleon to Elba, a Congress of European Powers was held at Vienna. This congress was the first occasion on which all the Powers of Europe met to settle international affairs by peaceful deliberation. It was the greatest European assembly that had met since the Council of Constance. Poland was not directly represented, but her claim to be reconstituted was, remarkably enough, put forward by the Emperor of Russia. Alexander I. was a ruler of high principles and breadth of view, animated by unmistakable sympathy for the Poles; and throughout the negotiations at the Congress he was guided to a great extent by Prince Adam Czartoryski, the most distinguished Pole of the time.

The Congress had practically to re-draw the map of Europe, but the most critical questions requiring settlement were connected with the fate of Saxony and Poland. As regards the latter country, Alexander I., eager to introduce his era of reform, had set his heart on obtaining the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and Prussia demanded the whole of Saxony as compensation for her loss in the east. But Austria was firmly opposed to such aggrandisement on the part of an old rival, and on this point was supported by France

and England. Alexander, however, was in a very strong position, for his army was actually in occupation of the territory claimed, and, in addition, he knew his own mind and what he was determined to acquire. So high did feeling run that at one time there seemed to be a prospect of a new European war. But at the last more prudent counsels prevailed, and the matter was peaceably settled. Russia received the whole of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, except Posen and Thorn—which were made over to Prussia—and Prussia received further compensation in Saxony. Russia also retained Lithuania and the other Slav provinces of the old Polish State. It was distinctly laid down that the Emperor of Russia was to include among his titles that of King of Poland. Galicia was restored to Austria, with the exception of the city of Cracow, which was to form an independent republic guaranteed by the Great Powers.

The Congress of Vienna marked the formal triumph of reaction against the principles of the Revolution; but the charge has been brought against it that it acted against the principles of race, tradition and religion, and parcelled out Europe in an arbitrary and impractical way. So far as Poland is concerned, the charge seems not without justification. Its restoration as a

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NORTH SEA
DENMARK
Hamburg
Bremen
KINGDOM OF WESTPHALIA
CONFEDER
HESSE
Brussels
Cologne
Frankfort
Channel Is.
Seine
Paris
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Loire
VENDÉE
FRENCH
Lyons
Rhone
SWITZERLAND
KINGDO
LOMBARDY
Milan
Genoa
PIEDMONT
Bordeaux
GALICIA
Oporto
Toulouse
Marseilles
Ebro
Corsica
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
Lisbon
Tagus
Madrid
Barcelona
VALENCIA
Valencia
Balearic Is.
KINGDOM OF SARDINIA
MURCIA
Seville
MEDITERRAN

MAP 3. To face p. 230.

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homogeneous nation was as far off as ever, and the scheme sanctioned by the Congress of Vienna was merely a further partition of an already divided State.

This statement will be readily understood by summarising the decisions of the Congress of Vienna as regards Poland. The territories of that country were, after 1815, under five distinct administrations. Firstly, there was an Austrian Poland; then, Prussian Poland; next, the Lithuanian territories which had been incorporated as an integral part of the Russian Empire; then came the new autonomous Congress kingdom, to be ruled by the Emperor of Russia as its king; and, finally, the microscopic republic of Cracow, jointly guaranteed by the Great Powers.

CHAPTER XIII

A CENTURY OF RUSSIAN RULE

THE character of Alexander I. of Russia was too complex to grapple successfully with such a problem as that now presented by Poland. The grandson of Catherine II., his early education had been superintended by that mistress of statecraft. But the liberal choice exercised in the selection of the young prince's tutors, however admirable in theory, was somewhat impractical. In 1783 Colonel Cesar Laharpe, a Swiss, became the child's instructor, and he soon indoctrinated his young charge with the principles of the Revolution and the teachings of Rousseau and Voltaire. From his lips Alexander learned the doctrines of liberty, equality and fraternity, but bitter experience was to reveal to him the wide gulf which yawns between liberalism in theory and liberalism as a practical factor in political life. This enlightenment, however, came later. In his young days Alexander confided to his intimates his detestation of the principles of his grandmother, and his determination to grant liberty to his subjects when

he should come to the throne. His sympathy had been especially aroused by the heroic resistance of the Poles during their revolution in 1794, and by the personality of Kosciusko, whom he had been allowed to visit in prison; while his interest in Poland was still further stimulated by the fact that in early life he had come under the influence of Prince Adam Czartoryski, a noble Pole, devotedly attached to the interests of his native country. Czartoryski, who was distantly related to the Imperial Family, had come to St. Petersburg, in 1795, nominally as a petitioner for the restoration of his family estates, but really as a hostage. Catherine had made him aide-de-camp to the Grand Duke. A warm friendship had sprung up between the impressionable young men, and to the patriotic and burning zeal of the young Pole Alexander had lent a ready ear.

Not that the ingrained and inherited spirit of autocracy was dead in the Russian Grand Duke. His father, the half-demented Paul I., was removed by assassination during the night of March 2nd, 1801. The open, impressionable, enthusiastic Alexander ascended the throne in the flush of early and noble manhood, and in 1815 he found himself the greatest of living sovereigns, and practically the Dictator of Europe.

He became impressed with the idea that he had a divine mission to restore peace and order to the world, and his enthusiastic projects were guided by religious superstition. With this view he persuaded the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia to league themselves with him in a Holy Alliance. The necessary document, which was signed on September 26th, 1815, enjoined the signatories to regulate their foreign and domestic policy by the precepts of Christianity, to promote brotherly love amongst their subjects, and to do all in their power for the maintenance of peace. Sincere though the motives expressed in the preamble undoubtedly were, the Holy Alliance was really a ponderous piece of political artillery trained on the principles of the Revolution. It was the outcome of an unpractical enthusiasm, and represented theories even then discarded and out of date. Like other leagues of the same description, the Holy Alliance was to serve rather as an instrument of despotism than as a promoter of peace and goodwill, and has been described by impartial historians as, at best, an act of misguided fanaticism, and, at worst, an example of pompous hypocrisy. It certainly was in direct conflict with the question of the restoration of Poland.

But there can be no doubt whatever but that

Alexander I. honestly and sincerely tried to maintain the independence of the Poles. On the 27th November, 1815, a constitutional charter was granted to the new kingdom. Its articles were of so liberal a description as to astonish all Europe, and they abundantly prove that at the time of their promulgation Alexander was not, as yet, an enemy of liberal institutions. Of the main provisions the most important were those granting complete toleration in religion, freedom of the press, and inviolability of property and person. Further, all public business was to be transacted in the Polish language, and all offices, civil and military, were to be held by natives alone. The national representation was to be vested in two chambers—senators and deputies; the legislative power resting with the king and the two chambers. An ordinary Diet was to be held every two years, and an extraordinary one whenever judged necessary by the king. In all there were, in the new Constitution, 165 articles, the liberal tendency of which may be judged from the few clauses above summarised.

The reception which this well-meaning and sympathetic scheme was to meet with was such as to wound an impressionable character like that of Alexander. In Russia the new Polish constitution caused an outburst of hostility. There

the reactionary party professed to view with alarm the existence of a Polish army, and openly stated that this unwise concession on the part of the Emperor would lead to the loss of such portions of Poland as had by this become integral portions of the Empire; and the progressive element of politics murmured, thinking, and not unjustly, that liberalism—like charity—might well begin at home. The patriot Kosciusko was under no illusions as to the effect bound to be produced in Russia. Writing to Prince Czartoryski he thus expressed himself: "From the first I foresee a very different state of things. The Russians will occupy with us the chief posts in the Government. This will certainly not inspire the Poles with any great confidence. They foresee, not without fear, that in time the Polish name will fall into contempt, and that the Russians will treat us as their subjects." As regards the Poles, they were dissatisfied with the new constitution, chiefly for the reason that it did not go far enough. Liberal though the concessions granted were, they fell far short of the complete restoration of Poland which Alexander had led them to expect; and the great nobles considered that the share of government now vouchsafed them was inconsistent with their dignity and importance. They shook the dust of Warsaw from their feet and

made Kremenec a social centre of ultra-aristocratic ideals.

Quite apart from the hostility which Alexander's well-meant scheme aroused, it must be admitted that the new Constitution revealed some marked defects in practice. In the first place, the traditional power of the nobles was perpetuated, and the middle class and peasantry failed to obtain their due position in the government of the State. The franchise, indeed, was widened so as to include shopkeepers with a capital of 10,000 florins, all professors and teachers, and all artists or mechanics distinguished for talent. But the administration, both civil and judicial, was the domain of the nobles alone. Again, although Poland was to have a national army of 20,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry, such army was to be under a general appointed by the Emperor of Russia. His choice fell upon his brother Constantine, a man whose brutal and overbearing disposition was only in part relieved by such sympathy with Poland as was called into being by his affection for a Polish wife.

Alexander paid his first visit to Warsaw in November 1815, and was everywhere received with enthusiasm; his charm of manner and his well-known sympathy with the claims of Poland

appealed strongly to the impressionable side of the Polish nature. But soon the rift appeared within the lute. With the departure of Alexander becoming imminent, the burning question of the hour was, who was to hold the position of viceroy. High hopes had been entertained that Prince Adam Czartoryski would be nominated to the post, and his sterling patriotism and his social status would have endeared him to almost every Pole. But again Polish hopes were to be shattered. Czartoryski had to content himself with a seat in the Council of Ministers, and the first viceroy was General Zaïonchek, an aged veteran of the Napoleonic wars, but a man of little social influence, and destined to come almost immediately under the thumb of the commander-in-chief, the Grand Duke Constantine.

Alexander left Warsaw for St. Petersburg in the consciousness that his Utopian scheme would be crowned with success, and at first it seemed as if his hopes would be justified. But the conduct of Constantine upset whatever chances might have existed of realising Alexander's dream. The commander-in-chief behaved in the most arbitrary fashion, and soon showed by his conduct that he took not the smallest interest in the struggling plant of the new Constitution. A martinet of the old barrack-square pattern, he was the prototype

of the mythical adjutant, who is said to have declared that "nothing upsets a battalion so much as manœuvres, unless it is active service." Constantine was indeed devoted to the Polish army in his own way; but his way implied keeping the army aloof from active service, and it was at his express request that it was not employed in a war with Turkey. Such a commander-in-chief, overriding the authority of the viceroy and treating the civil authorities with brutal arrogance, was the very worst type conceivable to handle such a refractory people as the Poles at such a delicate crisis of their national existence.

The first meeting of the Diet was opened in 1818 by Alexander in person, and in his speech from the throne the Emperor stated that his hopes and those of his Polish subjects were being realised. Further, he held out hopes for the restoration of Greater Poland. But all chance of a peaceful evolution of a complex political question was nullified by the arrogant conduct of Constantine. His instincts and actions were those of a despot—so much so that, in spite of the fact that liberty of the press had been guaranteed by the new Constitution, it was the custom of the commander-in-chief to send soldiers to break up the type and to suppress the newspaper

concerned whenever an article reflecting on his conduct had appeared. The University of Warsaw had its doors closed because some of its students gave vent to liberal opinions; and, as a punishment for an exhibition of firmness on the part of the Diet, which came to an end in 1820, five years elapsed before another was convoked. These were years of disillusionment and estrangement. Amongst the Poles secret societies, sheltering themselves in the security afforded by freemasons' lodges, took root and multiplied; while Alexander, on his part, was gradually becoming convinced that Utopias are not to be founded by benevolent despotism alone, and was sloughing off his liberal principles one by one. His changed attitude towards Poland was shown on the occasion of the opening of the third Diet in 1825, for Alexander's speech was cold and unsympathetic, and the publication of the debates of the Diet was forbidden. Nevertheless, his genuine sympathy for Poland was not altogether dead. His pride was appeased by the tactful submission of the Diet. On closing its session he held out hopes for the future, while in private he reiterated his intentions of restoring the Western Provinces of Russia to Poland. But, a few weeks later, he died on the morning of December 1st, 1825. Alexander had been a true friend to Poland;

and no monarch ever wielded unlimited power with a loftier resolve to promote the happiness of his people.*

Next in the actual line of succession was the Grand Duke Constantine, but he had renounced his rights in 1820 in order to marry a Polish lady. The throne was, therefore, mounted by Nicholas, the third brother, eighteen years younger than Alexander, and a man of a totally different stamp. Nicholas was pre-eminently reactionary, and an autocrat without that tinge of liberalism which had done so much to soften his brother's rule; and the severity of his character was scarcely compensated for by unfailing devotion to duty or by the lofty stature and majestic bearing which physically characterized him. The initial years of his reign in Russia were crowned with success. A military plot in Moscow was crushed chiefly by the courage and daring displayed by the Emperor himself. Turkey and Persia had been humilitated by force of arms; and Russia was beginning to hold her ground firmly against the dictatorial diplomacy of Metternich. Poland, however, was in a state of grave unrest, and the loyalty of the army had been undermined by the Emperor's decision to yield to the wishes of Constantine and to refrain from using it in

* "Expansion of Russia," F. H. Skrine, p. 84.

the war against the Turks. This injudicious action on the part of Nicholas prevented the rise of a spirit of comradeship and blood-brotherhood between the Russian and Polish regiments in a common cause against a hereditary foe. The absence of emulation and the means of gratifying a thirst for military glory made the Polish army a willing instrument of sedition. Disloyalty, indeed, was rampant in every class in Poland, and a plot was hatched for the assassination of Nicholas at his coronation as King of Poland. But, though the ceremony passed off without untoward incident, on the 24th of May, 1829, many impressive features were omitted. The crown was placed upon the head of Nicholas, not in the cathedral of Warsaw but in the Hall of Ceremonies of the Senate; the part played by the Catholic clergy was shorn of much of its impressiveness; the very crown used was not the old crown of Poland, but a brand new one brought from St. Petersburg for the occasion; and the investiture, instead of being hailed with loyal shouts of *Vivat Rex in æternum*, was received with ominous and chilling silence.

Nicholas soon showed his lack of sympathy with the national aspirations of the Poles, and his determination to override the liberal constitution granted by his brother. Freedom of the

press was abolished. Taxation was enforced without the consent of the Diet. A system of coercion and arbitrary arrest was introduced. The Poles soon realised the difference between King Stork and King Log, and bitterly resented the autocratic government of their new ruler. Soon the country was seething with discontent. The mine of revolution was laid, and it needed but a chance spark to set it off. It was in Western Europe that the train was fired in the year 1830. An insurrection took place in Belgium, and in France the Bourbon throne was overturned. The triumph of the citizens and the press against the soldiery of Charles X. was a signal for a reaction throughout Europe against arbitrary and unpopular sovereigns. On all sides crowns were falling into the gutter, and the success of the revolution in Paris, which, in July, 1830, placed Louis Philippe on the throne of France, roused the Poles to action.

The insurrection in Poland began with a conspiracy of the students of the University of Warsaw and of the aristocratic School of the Standard Bearers, to seize the person of Constantine at the Palace of Belvedere, a residence of the Grand Duke's in the vicinity of Warsaw. In the dusk of the evening of November 29th twenty young men proceeded to the Belvedere, where

they killed General Gendre and the Vice-President, Lubowicksi. Utterly taken by surprise and panic stricken at the shouts of "Death to Tyranny," Constantine fled to his wife's apartments and took refuge in a garret. Meanwhile the population of Warsaw had risen *en masse*, armed themselves at the arsenal and seized many Russian officers at the theatre. Forty thousand muskets and vast stores of ammunition fell into the hands of the rebels. The Russian garrison, left without orders, was helpless, and the Polish soldiery quickly sided with their compatriots. Constantine retired, with some 8,000 troops who had remained faithful to the Russian cause, to a village some miles from Warsaw. The whole country was soon in open rebellion; the defection of the Polish soldiery gave great strength to the movement; and persons of weight and distinction now threw in their lot with the national cause.

Hitherto the Poles had acted without any regularly appointed leader; but the Polish army was now put under General Chlopicki, a veteran of the Napoleonic wars, who eventually assumed a species of absolute dictatorship. The Diet was summoned and negotiations were, in the first instance, opened with Constantine, who, however, gave an evasive answer, though, at the same time, he sent back a Polish regiment

which had remained loyal to him. Envoys were now sent to Nicholas; but the Emperor refused to treat with insurgents, and on December 17th, 1830, he issued a manifesto, in which were included many hard and bitter words. "The Polish people," he wrote, "had enjoyed peace and prosperity under his ægis; but, forgetting past misfortunes, they had again plunged into a revolution with its attendant horrors. A handful of madmen, inwardly dreading their approaching punishment, had dared for an instant to dream of victory, and to propose conditions to their lawful sovereign." Stung into making a retort, the Poles replied with a decree to the effect that the Romanovs had for ever forfeited the throne of Poland. But Nicholas had already realised that the difficult problem of Poland was to be solved, not by proclamations but by bayonets, and already Field Marshal Dietritch was on his way to the frontier *en route* for Warsaw, at the head of 120,000 men.

Realising the hopelessness of an armed struggle against Russia, General Chlopicki resigned, and was succeeded by Prince Radziwill; and, on the Russian side, Dietritch, having concentrated his army at Bialystok and Grodno, entered Poland on February 5th, 1831. The campaign opened not unfavourably for the Poles, for the Russians

were defeated at Grochov on February 19–20th; and, although two days later the Russians were within striking distance of Warsaw, the strategical situation necessitated leaving that city unbesieged and carrying out operations in the field. These, however, seem to have been continued without a sound plan, for the Russian general committed the error of dividing his force into three weak columns, two of which met with early defeat. It seemed as if the unequal contest was to go in favour of the Poles, as, indeed, it probably would have done had the Great Powers been induced to intervene at this moment. The Diet had sent out a manifesto setting forth, in strong language, the wrongs of Poland; but Europe did not respond to this agonising appeal of a nation struggling for its existence. Public opinion in France and England was, it is true, profoundly stirred; but the Governments of those two countries contented themselves with mild protests. The terms of the Congress of Vienna still guided Western diplomacy. The sovereignty of Russia had been decided upon at that assembly, and the Poles, by their unfortunate decree by which the house of Romanov was to be deposed, lost whatever chance they might otherwise have possessed of securing the intervention of the other Powers.

The setback to the Russians was only temporary, and although the campaign was marked by several desperate battles, fought with varying success, the issue was not long in doubt. The Poles, though aided by insurrections in various parts of the country, were forced to yield to superior numbers and discipline. For a time it seemed as if the Russians were to go down before a new enemy. For the first time in Europe, Asiatic cholera, introduced by the Russian soldiers returning from Turkey, gained the proportions of an epidemic. The scourge of this disease sapped the fighting value of the Russian armies, but, in spite of this handicap, they inflicted a crushing defeat on the Polish forces at Ostrolenka on May 26th. Preparations were at once made for the siege of Warsaw, but operations were delayed by the death from cholera of the Russian general Dietritch, a disease which also carried off the Grand Duke Constantine. The new Russian commander, General Paskievich, now crossed the Vistula below Warsaw, and moved up the left bank towards the capital. The Poles were in no condition to resist, and on the morning of September 8th, 1831, just as the Russians were advancing to storm the ramparts, a white flag was hoisted upon them. The garrison of 30,000 men evacuated the city, only to meet

with crushing defeat at the hands of an immensely superior Russian force.

By the end of November the whole country was under Russia's heel. In this patriotic rising the Poles had again and again displayed their traditional bravery, but their efforts had been marred by the futile spirit of dissension which was such a marked characteristic of the Polish people. "So there is an end of the Poles," wrote Lord Palmerston, "I am heartily sorry for them, but their case had become for some time hopeless."

Prussia, however, took a much more drastic view. "Poland," said the Prussian Minister, "had better be annihilated so as to have done with her once for all"—advice which was in full agreement with the opinions of Nicholas. The Emperor set himself at once to stamp out any smouldering embers of the revolutionary fires, and followed up his successes in the field by a ruthless display of cruelty. An amnesty was indeed issued; but with so many exceptions that scarcely anybody was safe. The prisons at Warsaw were soon filled to overflowing, and every effort was made to abolish the nationality of Poland. By a decree of February 26th, 1832, Poland was declared a Russian province. The University of Warsaw was suppressed; the Polish uniform and colours were abolished, and the Polish soldiery

were incorporated into Russian regiments; all important posts, both civil and military, were reserved for Russians; the Polish language was forbidden; a strict censorship of the press was established; and everything was done to secularise and suppress the Roman Catholic Church. Prince Radziwill and other leading Poles were relegated to the centre of the Empire, and by the end of 1832 it has been calculated that 80,000 Poles were sent into Siberia. Further steps were taken to diminish the population of Poland. Forty-five thousand families were transported into Russia to the Caucasus and the district of the Don, while orphans and male children of rebels and refugees were sent under escort to Russia to be brought up in Russian military schools. Henceforth until the death of the Emperor Nicholas during the Crimean War in 1855 there was no alleviation of the *régime* of severity and terror.

The condition of Poland for a generation after 1832 was largely influenced by the personality of the Russian Emperors during that period, but it would be a mistake to imagine that the affairs of Poland were influenced by that cause alone. The national policy of Russia at that time represented a clash of ideals between two schools of thought. Since the days of Peter the Great there had been a Western school, which was progessive

in tendency, and wished to bring Russia into contact and sympathy with the life, thought and institutions of Western Europe. Opposed to it was the reactionary and strictly Russian school, which elevated the old national standard to a party creed, and held that Russia's salvation was intimately bound up with the ecclesiastical traditions of Byzantium. This Old Russian party gained the name of Slavophils or Pan-Slavs, and, generally speaking, it favoured a centralised autocracy under the Emperor of Russia. It was not averse from admitting Poland into the inner circle of Slavism, but only on the condition that Poland should renounce its own national ideas. The Emperor Nicholas I. was a Slavophil, and both he and most of the leading men of Russia had regarded the Polish insurrection of 1831 with genuine detestation and alarm. In a word, the Pan-Slav school was reactionary, conservative, autocratic, and, above all things, Russian.

This school, however, underwent many modifications, and ultimately assumed a strongly democratic tinge, a change which was brought about almost entirely by the severely repressive government of its recognised head, Nicholas I. Thus the Old Russian party and the Emperor drifted apart, but for a time Nicholas kept the upper hand, and he pursued unflinchingly his task of

Russifying the Poles. The inevitable result was that the Poles began secretly to plot a new revolution, and even when the more liberal minded Alexander II. succeeded to the throne matters had gone too far to allow for reconciliation. Liberal though he was, the new Emperor detested Pan-Slavism with its growing democratic undercurrents; nevertheless, his plans for the government of Poland were lenient and humane. The administration was centralised. Education was re-organised. The University of Warsaw opened its doors again. The most important branches of Polish administration, such as the Post Office and Public Works, were separated from Russian control. The Polish language was made the medium of instruction in schools. All these reforms were, however, in vain, and one of Alexander's most notable efforts to assist Poland was to become the rallying ground of disaffection against him. In September, 1857, he founded the Agricultural Society, to deal with the complex land question, but it quickly assumed the character of a political organisation, where the aristocratic Whites and the democratic Reds met on common ground.

In Russia the Crimean War had exhausted the resources of the country and had given rise to great discontent. To satisfy his subjects

Alexander II. adopted a liberal policy and introduced a number of reforms, of which the greatest was the emancipation of the serfs. The peasants on the Crown domains, some 20,000,000 in number, received personal freedom from a series of edicts in 1858. More difficulty was experienced in dealing with the serfs of private owners, but, after long negotiations with the territorial lords, the great edict was issued on March 3rd, 1861. All peasants attached to the soil became free cultivators, with the permanent occupation of part of their land, the rest being left to the lord. The permanent occupation might be exchanged for absolute ownership by a money payment, and the Government organised a system of loans to enable the peasants to free themselves at once by becoming debtors to the State. There were political as well as humane motives for the measure which extended the Emperor's authority at the expense of the nobles. The change was by no means welcomed with unanimous approval. The upper classes resented the advance of despotism and demanded the concession of constitutional privileges, while the peasants thought less of the future gain than of the immediate loss of part of the land which they and their ancestors had cultivated for centuries; but on the whole the reform was both just and necessary,

and involved more important social changes than any measure since the first French Revolution.

This liberal policy of the new Emperor in his Russian territories seems to have excited great hopes among the Poles; but in this they were disappointed, and disappointment gave way to disaffection. During the closing months of 1862 sedition spread throughout the country, and, by an inexcusable political error, the Russian authorities practically invited revolution. Lists of young men of both the noble and burgher classes, who were objectionable to the authorities, were made out and orders were given that these were to be conscripted at once into the army. The measure was carried out in the most brutal manner, the youths being seized in their beds on the night of January 15th, 1863. Many, however, escaped to the neighbouring forests and became rallying centres of hostility to Russia. Insurrection sprang at once into life, and soon the whole country was in open revolt.

A week after the ill-advised action of the authorities the population of Warsaw made an attack upon the Russian garrison. It was repelled with ease, and henceforth operations degenerated into guerilla warfare, marked by all the savagery characteristic of this kind of fighting. The case of the Poles was hopeless unless foreign inter-

vention might come to their rescue ; but such assistance was conspicuous by its absence, and Prussia, indeed, concluded a convention with Russia. This was the work of Bismarck, who caused Prussian troops to be posted on the frontier ready to act against the Poles should the occasion demand it; while at the same time the Poles under Prussian rule were warned that, in the event of any rising on their part, they would incur the penalties of high treason. The field of hostilities was thus contracted, and with such effect, that on March 19th the last attempt at organised resistance in the field took place. Then followed a period of revolutionary and desperate intrigue, which amounted almost to a Reign of Terror. A secret Government was set up by the Poles which issued orders and even published several newspapers. Refusal to comply with the arbitrary commands of this tribunal was met by the weapon of assassination, and so powerful did this secret committee become that it commanded a wider obedience than the Russian Viceroy, backed though he was by 90,000 bayonets. Large contributions were called for to fill the secret treasury; they were paid over, if not without a murmur, at least without delay. In April, 1863, an amnesty was promised by the Emperor to all who would lay down their arms,

but not a rebel dared obey. A half-hearted attempt at intervention was now made by some of the Great Powers, and proposals for a European Conference were tentatively put forth. Russia, however, stood firm. Slowly but methodically she stamped out the embers of insurrection, and by February, 1864, the secret Government of Poland was finally extinguished.

Responsible opinion in Russia now held that liberalism on the banks of the Vistula had been an unmitigated failure, and the most strenuous efforts were made for a final and complete Russification of Poland. What were considered the two main factors of insurrectionary unrest in the country—the aristocracy and Roman Catholicism—were singled out for especial attack. The power of the former was completely shattered by a radical reform in the land system. A *ukase* of March, 1864, gave the peasants the fee-simple of the lands which they had hitherto cultivated as tenants at will, and a purposely vague right of access to the nobles' forest and pasture lands was also assigned them. Further, the power of the peasant was enormously increased—and that of the noble landlord correspondingly diminished—by the introduction of *gmina*, or village communes, protected from interference by noble or priest. As for the Catholic religion, it felt, no

less, the weight of Russia's wrath. Three-fourths of the monasteries were suppressed and their lands confiscated. The Church was deprived of its revenues. The village priests became salaried officers of the State. And land belonging to the Church was put up for auction at which Russians alone were allowed to bid. In 1866 these drastic changes in the national life of Poland had begun to take effect, and in the same year the country was divided into governments and placed under the Russian Minister of the Interior.

By this time all ideas of autonomy for Poland had been frankly abandoned and it was treated merely as a conquered country. The government was almost entirely military in character. The Russian language alone was made legal for public documents, and Polish was forbidden, both in public and private, in the church and in the drawing-room, in the newspapers and over shop-doors. By the system which conferred on the peasant the right to own land the Russian authorities hoped to produce a cleavage between the old aristocratic class and their former serfs which would, it was thought, hinder any amalgamation towards further revolutions; while the innovation of the village communes had the same end in view. Both schemes, however, had soon to be revised. As regards the latter, the Polish peasant

was, politically, unable to stand alone. Like his contemporary in England, he had been for long accustomed to look for guidance to the squire and parson; and, suddenly deprived of his natural leaders, he was helpless. The law, indeed, forbade any Russian officials to enter the local assemblies, but the opportunity of controlling the decisions of illiterate clowns—with its inviting possibilities of "squeeze"—was not lost upon the petty Russian officials throughout the country. They simply ignored the law; brought the village councils under their thumb; and opened the way for intolerable abuses. As for the system by which the peasant became a landowner at the very threshold of his former lord, such a radical innovation sent a thrill of horror through the nobles' caste in Russia. Russians and Poles united to alter—or, at least, to check—the system, and the political situation of Europe showed the Emperor the folly of estranging the aristocracy of Poland. By the end of 1866 Prussia had beaten Austria to her knees. It was no time for Utopian measures, and it was clear that, in the event of war with Prussia, the solid assistance of a class which had a stake in the country was to be preferred to the inarticulate gratitude of a class just emerging from degradation.

In 1874 the last claim of Poland to be regarded

as a separate nation disappeared, for in that year the viceroyalty was abolished and Poland became merely a Russian province. What is known, therefore as the Polish question became one practically of Russian politics, and the treatment of Poland depended almost entirely on the international situation of Russia, upon the political party actually in power in the Empire, and even upon the individual temperament and ideals of successive governors-general. For a time a policy of conciliation was in vogue; and, although the process of Russification still went on, it was carried out with sympathy and tact and with regard to Polish ideals. A change, however, was brought about by the accession of Alexander III. on the assassination of his father in 1881. The new ruler was essentially Russian and a Slavophil of the extreme type, firmly believing in the benefits of autocratic rule and strictly orthodox in religion. It is the natural tendency of a ruler who owes his elevation to the throne to the assassination of his predecessor to be biassed in favour of repression, and with Alexander III. the stern and unbending Old Russian party received a new lease of life. From the very first Alexander III. showed his determination to give his empire an exclusively Russian character, and amongst other reforms he caused the Russian

language to be substituted very largely for French both as the language of the Court and of the Foreign Office. With a ruler of these views Poland could not expect any slackening in the process of Russification, and Alexander III. set himself at once to the task of stamping out nationalism in Poland chiefly by a policy of repression directed against the schools and the Roman Catholic Church. The Emperor, however, by his coercive measures gradually estranged the more enlightened classes in Russia, with the unfortunate result that the official caste in Poland ceased to find a recruiting ground amongst humane and intelligent Russians of the educated classes. The minor officials in Poland were soon of a very poor stamp, and their existence has done much to foster the difference between Russia and the Poles.

The Roman Catholic Church proved too strong for the pin-pricks of Russian bureaucracy, but there was in White Russia a sect much less powerful and completely at the mercy of the Government. The Uniats were those who had agreed to acknowledge the nominal supremacy of the Pope while retaining the right to believe and worship in their own way. With a faith thus founded on a compromise, the Uniats had been persecuted alike by the Roman Catholic Church of Poland and the Orthodox religion of

Russia; but though persecution had failed to drive them into the Church of Rome, the action of the Russian Government succeeded in doing so. During the reign of Nicholas I. a petition had been forwarded to the Emperor by a section of the Uniats applying for admission to the Orthodox Church, and this led to a violent attempt at proselytism, with the object of gathering all the Uniats into the Orthodox fold. Such attempt was bitterly resented by the genuine Uniats—who formed the overwhelming majority of the sect—so that a system of persecution prevailed for over sixty years, which reached its zenith when the fanatical Pobyedonostseff was procurator of the Holy Synod. The failure of the proselytising system was revealed in 1905, when Nicholas II. established the principle of religious liberty for Poland. Nearly a quarter of a million Uniats at once joined the Roman Catholic Church, thus taking the earliest possible opportunity of showing to the world that they identified themselves not with Russia but with Poland.

It is not easy, under a few generalities, to sum up the condition of Poland under the last century of Russian rule, but there are certain facts so unquestioned as to be beyond the pale of discussion. In the first place, the emancipation of the serfs in 1864 produced a profound change

in the Poland of the twentieth century when compared with the Poland of the era of the Partitions. When the Great War of 1914 broke out the nobles and the clergy were no longer the nation. The splitting up of the landed estates, with the increase of wealth and comfort to the peasant class, led not only to a class of thrifty cultivators, but also tended to an increase of population; and the surplus of this population helped to form the class of artizans and to increase the growth of the towns and cities of Poland. From this artizan class there grew up the Polish middle class, a wholly new element of Polish life, and one whose absence in the eighteenth century was one of the predisposing causes of Poland's ruin. That these were tangible and undoubted benefits no one will deny; but when other factors of the twentieth century are reviewed the same unanimity of opinion is not to be found. Much of the Polish political literature of the years immediately preceding the war is strongly anti-Russian in tone, and the effect of Russian rule is soured by the memories of the undoubtedly brutal treatment meted out after 1831 and 1863. The opinion of a non-Pole is, therefore, likely to be more impartial, and that of Mr. F. A. Skrine may be quoted as typical of expert historical opinion in England.

Writing in 1903 he thus summed up the history of Poland subsequent to the outbreak of 1863: "The later history of this unhappy land offers one proof more that material advantage is a more powerful lever in affecting assimilation than edicts worthy of Draco himself. Protection, which has stunted so many branches of Russian trade, has proved an unmixed blessing to Poland. The removal of custom barriers gave her alert and enterprising people access to 125,000,000 consumers. Feudalism has succumbed to the modern industrial spirit; Warsaw has quadrupled its population in forty years; and the growth of other trade centres can be paralleled only in the United States and Australia. The national character shows the impress of the silent revolution. It is more practical and positive than of yore; and there is a decrease in the tendency to indulge in generous illusions. Poles under Russia's sway witness the sufferings endured by their comrades in Posnania and Galicia. They are well aware that their only choice lies between the Russian and the German yoke; and they prefer the former."*

The material progress of Poland did not, however, entirely obliterate her dreams of self-government, for a Pan-Polish movement, associated with the National Democratic Party, steadily

* "The Expansion of Russia," F. A. Skrine, p. 213.

gained ground. Its object was to unite all the Poles into an autonomous State under the Russian Crown. The movement was not regarded with particular favour in Russia, and, indeed, led to reactionary measures of repression on the part of the Russian bureaucracy in Poland. But in 1914 the political situation in Europe underwent such a transformation as to bring the question of a conciliatory policy towards Poland once more into the foreground. On August 1st, 1914, Germany declared war on Russia, and a fortnight later a dramatic proclamation was addressed to the Poles by the Russian commander-in-chief, the Grand Duke Nicholas, in the following terms :—

" Poles ! The hour has come when the dream of your fathers and forefathers will at length be realised.

" A century and a half ago the living body of Poland was torn in pieces, but her soul has not perished. She lives in the hope that the time will come for the resurrection of the Polish nation and its fraternal union with all Russia.

" The Russian armies bring you the glad tidings of this union. May the frontiers which have divided the Polish people be broken down. May it once more be united under the sceptre of the Russian Emperor. Under this sceptre Poland

will come together, free in faith, in language and in self-government.

"One thing Russia expects of you: an equal consideration for the rights of those nations with which history has linked you.

"With open heart, with hand fraternally outstretched, great Russia comes to you. She believes that the sword has not rusted which overthrew the foe at Tannenberg.

"From the shores of the Pacific Ocean to the Polar Sea the Russian war-hosts are in motion. The morning star of a new life is rising for Poland.

"May there shine resplendent in the dawn the sign of the Cross, the symbol of the Passion and Resurrection of nations."

The reference to Tannenberg was an allusion to the great victory gained by the Poles over the Teutonic Knights in 1410. By an ironical coincidence the same village was to witness, within a couple of weeks, defeat and disaster to the Russian arms.

The disaster at Tannenberg shattered, for the time, any hopes which may have existed of the restoration of Poland by Russia. Almost immediately, however, victory crowned the Russian arms in Austrian Poland. Early in September 1914,

Lemberg fell and the Russian advance was continued until eventually Przemysl was in their hands. In October the Germans were completely repulsed from Warsaw. But that city was captured by them in August 1915, and the German troops pushed on to, and seized, Brest-Litovsk, Grodno and Vilna.

It is beyond the scope of this volume to deal with the events of the Great European War. It is merely necessary to state that on November 5th, 1916, a proclamation was issued by the Central Powers as to the future of Poland.* To this the Emperor of Russia replied by an Order of the Day to the Russian army and navy on December 25th, in which he stated that Russia would not lay down her arms until she had achieved the possession of Constantinople and the Dardanelles and the creation of a free Poland, composed of the three hitherto separated portions.

The closing days of 1916 are ever memorable for the peace offer put forward by the German Emperor. This was followed by an appeal from the President of the United States of America to the belligerent Powers. The absence of any concrete basis of negotiation in the German Emperor's offer led to its immediate rejection by the Allies, who put forward definite proposals of their own, among which was a determination to support Russia in

* *See* p. 282.

her efforts for the restoration of Poland as outlined in the Emperor's Order of the 25th December 1916. Russia followed this up on the 26th January 1917 by an official expression of opinion towards President Wilson's efforts. While expressing full sympathy with his humanitarian efforts, Russia laid stress upon her unalterable determination, already put forward, regarding Poland.

CHAPTER XIV

PRUSSIANISM FOR A HUNDRED YEARS

THERE is no point in connection with Poland more difficult to write of than that which deals with the rule of Prussia over the territories gained by her, for there is a national tendency, at the present time, to regard European politics from an anti-German point of view. The question of German, or Prussian, rule—for as regards the Polish question the two terms are practically synonymous—must, therefore, be looked at with scrupulous fairness and the reader must endeavour to survey the subject from the point of view of an enlightened and patriotic German.

Bismarck was perfectly frank about the matter. "The Polish question is to us a question of life and death" was the way in which he expressed himself to the British Ambassador at the time of the Polish *émeute* against Russian rule in 1863. At that time there were two parties among the Poles; the Reds, or extreme Republicans, who desired the institution of an independent republic; and the Whites, who would have been content

with autonomy under the Russian Crown, and were supported by a considerable party in Russia itself. But Bismarck foresaw that neither party would rest content with Russian Poland; they would demand Posen, and would never rest until they had gained the coast of the Baltic and deprived Prussia of her Eastern Provinces. An independent republic on the eastern frontier of Prussia would have been a danger, but a danger as nothing compared to a Poland reconciled with Russia and supported by the Pan-Slav party and by Russian arms.

This prospect of the regeneration of Poland under Russian protection accounts for much of the bitterness which Prussia has shown in endeavouring to stamp out Polish nationality both within and without her own borders, and is bound up with what is really a maritime question. The command of the Baltic waters had led Prussia to set her heart on the acquisition of Dantzig, which, it will be remembered, was gained by her in 1793. But Russia, ever in search of ice-free ports, had turned longing eyes in the same direction ever since the days of Peter the Great. The possession of Dantzig by Prussia also, not unnaturally, riveted the attention of that Power on the River Vistula—of which Dantzig is the entrance—and there grew up a

feeling throughout Eastern Germany as to the desirability of reaching that river and of utilising it as a natural frontier against Russia. Such a policy, if carried into effect, would also have had the effect of "flattening out" the great salient where, west of Warsaw, Russia projects into the German Empire. The existence of this salient was not altogether to the disadvantage of Germany so long as she could count on the assistance of Austria, as will be understood by reference to a map of Europe; but, on the other hand, the Vistula with its fortresses formed an admirable rallying point for any Russian troops operating in the salient, against a converging movement from East Prussia and Galicia.

Apart from the strategic questions implied by command of the Baltic and a suitable frontier, Prussia had undoubtedly been alarmed by a purely racial question; that is to say, whether Germanism or Polonism was to prevail in the eastern portion of the monarchy. Unobserved and almost unsuspected, a growth of Polish influence had, in certain parts of Prussia, replaced German sentiment, culture, ideals and institutions. "In many districts of West Prussia, Posen and Silesia, the Poles form the great majority, as far as 90 per cent. of the population, while the average number of Slavs in these

provinces is about 12 per cent. of the whole. The towns of the entire east of Germany were, a generation ago, German to the core. The Polish districts in the east have preserved their former character, except that, owing to a large natural increase and a strong migration of Germans, the Slav race has further increased its predominance. But a great revolution has gradually set in, and one which in the future will make itself felt with increasing force—the towns in the east are being Polonised. A further new and rapidly growing movement is the migration of Slav labourers in united bands to the industrial districts of the west."*

Prussia's reply to the dangers to which she felt she was exposed was a ruthless suppression of Polish nationalism, using as her weapons the expulsion of Poles from Prussia, German immigration into and colonisation of Poland, religious persecution, and suppression of the Polish language.

The policy of force was, however, not the first one employed, for between 1815 and 1830 in the Grand Duchy of Posen a genuine effort was made to conciliate Polish sentiment. The Polish

* *Jahrbücher der Natiönalökonomie*, quoted in "Evolution of Modern Germany," by W. H. Dawson. Sixth edition, 1914.

language and nationality were officially recognised; the white eagle of Poland was impaled upon the black eagle of Prussia as the new arms of the Grand Duchy; and a viceroy was appointed to the province in the person of Prince Anthony Radziwill, a descendant of the royal house of Jagello. Under the thorough-going Prussian administration the benefits conferred upon Poland during this period were undoubtedly very great. The serfs were emancipated, and this reform was introduced not merely for the purpose of erecting an anti-noble class, as was contrived by the Russian *ukase* in 1864. The country was covered with a network of roads. Trade was encouraged and progressive methods of agriculture were introduced. But, beneficial though these reforms were to Poland, the noble and clerical classes remained reactionary and anti-Prussian. These backwoodsmen were in constant communication with professional revolutionists in Austrian and Prussian Poland, and over 12,000 of them crossed over from Posen and joined in the revolution of 1830. It was this fact which made the Government of Prussia renounce the policy of conciliation and adopt a measure of repression. The viceroyalty was abolished and a reign of strong government began.

In the year 1848 the wave of liberalism

which spread over Prussia evoked considerable sympathy for the Polish cause; but the rising power of Bismarck portented an era of repression and denationalisation for Poland. His hands were, to a certain extent, tied by the wars of 1864, 1866, and 1870; but on the conclusion of the last-named he set himself, with characteristic thoroughness, to deal with the question. By the year 1885 he had come to the conclusion that the simplest way to deal with the penetration of Poles into the Kingdom of Prussia, was to adopt a drastic policy of expulsion, and although thousands of Polish families had been settled on German soil for very many years, they were compelled at the shortest notice, to return to their native country. Some 35,000 persons were thus forced into what was, in reality, exile. Very many had become, to all intents and purposes, Prussian. A large number had served in the Prussian army and still belonged to the landwehr. Some were actually veterans of the great war of 1870. Many workmen who had been for years members of mutual relief societies in Prussia, and were now entitled to provision in their old age, were now deprived of the results of their thrift. Many of them only spoke German, from having resided so long in Prussia. It was difficult for them to find employment in Russian Poland.

No distinctions were allowed. One and all were compelled to leave their homes.*

Not content with this drastic measure, Bismarck followed it up, in 1886, by a project which has, more than any other, embittered the Poles, and that without effecting the end the author had in view. In April of that year there was founded the *Ansiedelungs Kommission*, or Colonisation Commission, the avowed object of which was to buy lands from Polish proprietors in Posen and West Prussia and to sell it again to German colonists. Of this project it has been well said that "it required the assumption that political economy had been banished to the planet Mars,"† and the result may be summed up in the brief phrase "total failure." An initial grant of £5,000,000 was made over to the Association, which set busily to work, but with the result which a student of economics—or of human nature—might have expected. Government Commissions are notoriously unskilled in buying in the cheapest market. Landed proprietors have always an eye to the main chance. The Polish landowners held up their land until the Government price reached an unusually tempting figure, whereupon the landowners, who did know how to buy in the

* "The Partitions of Poland," by Lord Eversley," p. 306.

† "Evolution of Modern Germany," by W. H. Dawson.

cheapest market, would purchase other estates from Germans at advantageous prices. On these they would settle Polish tenants as small holders, thus defeating the end the Prussian Government had in view. Further, many Prussians, seeing their Polish neighbours disposing of their properties at fancy prices, hastened to place their own estates under nominal Polish possession. These were then sold to the Prussian Government as Polish lands, and the real owner retired with a solid capital sum, less merely the commission paid to the Polish man of straw.

On the other hand, such German buyers as bought land from the Commission found their lives made intolerable by a policy of the most rigid boycott. The Poles, too, aided their compatriots by the establishment of a Co-operative Land Bank, with the result that, after ten years working of the Commission, the Poles had created exactly as many proprietors of Polish nationality as the Colonisation Commission had of German, and that in a shorter time. A species of economic warfare then ensued between the Prussian Minister of Finance and the Polish Land Banks. These, however, aided by the contributions of the wealthy and by the savings of the peasant and artizan class, managed more than to hold their own. During the ten years

1895–1906 the Germans lost to the Poles 125,000 acres. The war was carried into German territory, for even in East Prussia not only had the German population diminished by 630,000, but as many as 300,000 Polish immigrants had settled in the province. In 1907 Prince von Bülow, on the part of the Prussian Government, returned again to the attack and carried a measure through the Prussian Diet giving power to the Land Commission to acquire Polish estates by compulsory purchase and at a fixed price. This new project was strenuously combated by the Poles, and although definite statistics are lacking, it seems that the balance of land in Polish hands had still further increased, and that another failure had to be registered against Prussia's land policy.

In point of time Bismarck's policy of expulsion and confiscation had been preceded by religious persecution. Recognising the power exercised by the priesthood in a country so Roman Catholic as Poland was, he seized the occasion of the dogma of Papal Infallibility, in 1870, to attack Roman Catholicism by a war of religion or *kulturkampf*, as it was called. Here, however, he was to find that religion can triumph over national and racial interests, for much sympathy and support were afforded to the Poles by the

German Ultramontanes. Indeed, when it is a question of Roman Catholicism against Protestantism, the Roman Catholic of Germany was apt to forget his nationality and to vote at the polls for the candidate who would undertake the safeguarding of the true faith. Bismarck was never tired of ridiculing the German romanticism which was so enthusiastic for the welfare of other nations, and in 1888 one of the last of his great speeches in the Reichstag was devoted to attacking the Polish sympathies of the Catholic party in Prussia. But ridicule as he might, Bismarck can scarcely have failed to realise the glaring error of his religious tactics. Religion thrives on persecution; Bismarck's policy succeeded only in arousing a passionate antagonism; and the priests of Poland were not slow to fire the peasantry with an enthusiasm half religious, half nationalistic, and wholly intense.

The earlier and middle portions of Bismarck's political life were an effort to struggle against a German attitude of mind which was distinctly pro-Polish. He himself used to recall the memories of his boyhood, when, after the rebellion of 1831, Polish refugees were received in every German town with honours exceeding those paid to men who had fought for Germany, and when German

children could be heard singing Polish national airs. As the years went by the intimate connexion between Poland and Germany increased. Poles helped Germans to fight for their liberty and, in return, it was hoped that Germany would help Poland to recover her independence. In 1848 Mieroslawski had been carried like a triumphant hero through the streets of Berlin; the Baden rebels placed themselves under the leadership of a Pole; and it was a Pole who commanded the Viennese in their resistance to the Austrian army. A Pole led the Italians to disaster at Novara. At a time when poets were still political leaders and the memory of Byron had not been effaced, there was scarcely a German poet who had not stirred up enthusiasm for Poland. It was against this sentiment that Bismarck had to contend. He was helped by the growing predominance of Prussia in Germany, and nothing shows the change which he has been able to bring about in German thought better than the attitude of the nation towards Poland.*

Bismarck also aimed at the complete extinction of the Polish language. Up to 1873 Polish children were taught in their own language, but in October of that year an order was issued making German compulsory in elementary schools,

* "Bismarck," J. W. Headlam, pp. 174, 175.

although an exception was made for religious instruction. A more serious blow, however, was aimed at Polish nationality in 1883, when it was ordained that this religious instruction should be in German if at least half the scholars were of German birth. Further repressive enactments were made against the Polish language by way of the Polish schools. In 1899 teachers were ordered to cease using Polish in their own homes, and in 1902 even Prussian bureaucracy was shocked by the revelation made in the Prussian Parliament that Polish children had been flogged for refusing to say the Lord's Prayer in German. But a far deeper impression was made in 1906 by the school strikes, when over 400,000 children came "out." An immense sensation was caused throughout Europe, which was deepened by the brutality with which Prussia endeavoured to stamp out the movement. Floggings were resorted to with such severity that several victims were said to have died from the effects, while vengeance by means of large fines was inflicted on the parents. The strike was almost ludicrous as an unequal struggle between children and the uncompromising officialdom of Prussia, but it had its noble side. It was an index of the fervid patriotism which animated Poland, and Europe had not witnessed such a spontaneous

movement amongst children since the Child's Crusade.

The endeavour of Prussia to suppress the Polish language was carried to an extraordinary pitch. The very names of the railway stations were printed in German only, and tickets were refused to travellers who used the Polish name for the station to which they wished to be booked. How the Poles felt on this language question will be understood by the following extract from a letter penned by a prominent member of the Polish aristocracy: "The Polish language has been banished from the school, from the administration and from all public institutions. So far has the embargo gone that religious teaching is no longer imparted to the children of the communal schools, but in German, a language which they understand only a little. Gratuitous private instruction in the Polish language is punished by fine or imprisonment. It is required of teachers and officials of Polish nationality that they shall speak only German in the family circle, and they are often removed from their native districts to distant parts of the country so that their Germanisation may be the better facilitated. . How far the antagonism to the Polish national sentiment has gone may be judged from the fact that not long ago police visits were made to the houses of

Polish scholars attending the upper classes of higher schools."*

Of the military operations which took place in Poland during the present war it is not proposed to deal. It is merely necessary to allude to the great offensive of 1915, when Germany, coming to the rescue of her tottering ally, began a great offensive against Russian Poland, with the result that Warsaw was entered on August 5th, and soon the greater part of Russian Poland was in German hands. The treatment meted out to the inhabitants seems to have been on a par with that which characterized the German advance through Belgium and Serbia. Some authorities indeed go further. "The atrocities perpetrated by the Germans in Belgium and France are mild compared with those which have been committed in Poland. . . . During the last few months the villagers in Poland have resorted to burning themselves alive in their homes rather than fall into German hands."† Certainly it is true that the German troops have acted in a manner characterised by gross bad taste, to say the very least. An example may be of interest.

* "The Evolution of Modern Germany," W. H. Dawson, p. 475.

† "Some Glimpses of Russian Poland To-day," W. F. Bailey, *Fortnightly Review*, September, 1915.

At Czentochowa, in the south-east of Russian Poland, there stands a church long famous for its shrine of Our Lady, ornamented by a famous picture of the Virgin and Child, probably the oldest picture in the world, and one held in especial veneration by the Poles. Knowing this fact, the German Emperor is said to have published a statement, through his secret agents, to the effect that the Virgin and Child had appeared to him in a dream, and implored him to rescue the shrine from Russian hands. But the Poles tore the proclamation into fragments, and in revenge the German Army, when it arrived at Czenstochowa, committed the usual atrocities and outrages. The church was desecrated and its picture wrenched from its frame for dispatch to Germany. Finally, to the dazed horror of the Poles, a vulgar portrait of the Kaiser in uniform was raised above the dismantled altar, lights were placed above it and the wretched people were daily driven in by the German soldiers to kneel before this representation of the twentieth century Caligula.

On the 5th November, 1916, a momentous decision, as affecting Poland, was made by the Central Powers. Germany and Austria-Hungary by joint action proclaimed Warsaw and Lublin the Kingdom of Poland, and ostensibly re-estab-

lished the right of the Polish nation to control its own destinies, to live an independent national life, and to govern itself by chosen representatives of the nation.

The manifesto issued at Warsaw and Lublin read as follows :—

" His Majesty the German Emperor and his Majesty the Emperor of Austria and Apostolic King of Hungary, inspired by firm confidence in a final victory of their arms, and prompted by a desire to lead the districts conquered by their armies, under heavy sacrifices, from Russian domination toward a happy future, have agreed to form of these districts a national State with a hereditary monarchy and a constitutional Government. The exact frontiers of the Kingdom of Poland will be outlined later.

" The new kingdom will receive the guarantees needed for the free development of its own forces by its intimate relations with both Powers. The glorious traditions of the ancient Polish armies and the memory of the brave comradeship in the great war of our days shall revive in a national army. The organisation, instruction and command of this army shall be arranged by common agreement.

" The allied monarchs express the confident hope that Polish wishes for the evolution of a

Polish State and for the national development of a Polish kingdom shall now be fulfilled, taking due consideration of the general political conditions prevailing in Europe and of the welfare and the safety of their own countries and nations.

"The great realm which the western neighbours of the Kingdom of Poland shall have on their eastern frontier shall be a free and happy State enjoying its own national life, and they shall welcome with joy the birth and prosperous development of this State."

The proclamation foreshadowed, in effect, a fresh partition of Poland; for Galicia was excluded from the scheme, and not merely did Prussia retain her own Polish districts, but apparently intended to detach the great industrial region of Western Poland from the new State to incorporate it in her own dominions. An hereditary monarchy and a Constitution were promised, but these all-important points and "the more precise regulation of the frontiers" were veiled in discreet silence. The central fact which determined the new arrangement was Hindenburg's need for men; and it was calculated that an army of 700,000 men could be raised for the defence of the Eastern Front. The grant of independence, made after prolonged delays, and obviously with extreme reluctance, was intended,

as the *Times* pointed out, "to lend some show of legality to the conscription of Russian subjects for a war against Russia." So momentous a decision on the part of Germany amounted to a fresh declaration of war against Russia.*

* *The New Europe*, "German Designs on Poland," Nov. 9, 1916.

CHAPTER XV

AUSTRIA AND THE POLES

THE relationship between Austria and Poland since the Congress of Vienna in 1815 was influenced to a marked degree by the change of status of Austria as a European Power. For a generation the treatment meted out to Poland was arbitrary, severe, and essentially German; the reason being that during that period Austria regarded herself as a German Power, and endeavoured to impose Germanic culture, language, and ideals throughout the State. A Polish rising in 1846 was dealt with by a drastic policy of repression, and the serfs were encouraged to rise against their overlords. Two years later Austria granted emancipation to these serfs and thus further increased her hold over the more powerful landowning class; while in 1846 the Republic of Cracow, which had been created as an independent State by the Treaty of Vienna, was annexed by Austria, apparently with the approval of Russia and Prussia.

There were reasons, however, which induced

Austria to have recourse to a milder *régime* in her dealings with Poland. In the first place, there is no such thing as an Austrian race—what is known under the wider nomenclature of "Austria" being a mosaic of nationalities, in which Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Croats and Rumanians have their part. This factor not unnaturally made for a more broad-minded system of government than would have been the case had the Poles been a mere insignificant minority in a really Austrian State; and, secondly, after 1848 the long-threatened struggle between Prussia and Austria for the leadership of Germany showed signs of coming to a head. Austria was forced to recognise the possibility of being worsted in the struggle which was bound to ensue, and was, therefore, induced to rally her Slav subjects round her as a counterpoise to the German influence and backing of Prussia. This tendency on the part of Austria was increased by strained relations with Russia and by the possibility that France, in the person of Napoleon III., might turn her attention from Italian questions to that of the restoration of Poland. To all these factors it was due that in February, 1861, the Emperor Francis Joseph granted Galicia, *i.e.*, the bulk of Austrian Poland, a constitution and a considerable amount of autonomy; and that since that period

the Poles, under Austrian rule, proved themselves for long the pillar of the Hapsburg monarchy.

In 1866 the long-expected struggle between Prussia and Austria took place, and the claims of the latter Power for supremacy in Germany were for ever shattered. Austria was expelled from the Germanic federation, and, in her humiliation, had to look round for allies. She thought to find these in the Poles; but the Poles were quick to see the advantage which now lay in their hands, and pressed for a recognition of the various nationalities and the creation of a federal system. To these projects Austria was forced to pay attention, for alone of all the Slav peoples of Austria the Poles were opposed to the Pan-Slav doctrines of Russia, by which the latter Power was to be the protector of the smaller Slav nationalities. Opposition to Russia was, therefore, the bond uniting Poles and Austrians. Amongst the latter there was, however, a powerful German element in favour of a centralised system. This party was backed up by the Magyars, and the federal system favoured by the Poles was shelved. The result was a compromise which in 1867 called into being the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. This arrangement was supported by the Poles, who, although they had failed in

their plan for federation, were strong enough to wring concessions from Vienna. In the new Austrian Cabinet a Minister for Galicia had a place; a separate board of education in Galicia was set up; the use of Polish in secondary schools was extended; and Polish was substituted for German as the language of the administration and the courts of law.

Further concessions followed, and in 1868 Polish became the language of the University of Cracow, while in the following year German officials were largely replaced by Poles, and Poles alone became eligible for positions on the professorial staffs at the universities of Cracow and Lemberg. On the whole, in the opinion of a competent critic,* a more striking illustration of the value and success of Home Rule could not well be conceived than that in the Polish parts of Galicia. Certainly in this portion of Poland the Poles enjoyed more liberty than they were allowed in any other. Not only had they there two Polish universities and Polish schools, but all official appointments were open to them and Polish was the official language of the province. The army also was Polish up to a certain point, for the Polish conscripts were not drafted to other provinces for the time of their military

* Lord Eversley.

service—as happened in Russian and Prussian Poland—but were allotted to garrisons in Galicia.

The question of Galicia is, however, complicated by a race factor. In the western area the population is almost entirely Polish, the exact proportion being about 90 per cent. of Poles with about 2·75 per cent. of Ruthenians, the rest of the population—after deducting about 1 per cent. of Germans—consisting of unassimilated Jews. In eastern Galicia, on the other hand, the nationalities are very mixed and, on the whole, the Ruthenians predominate, representing in some places more than 80 per cent. of the local population. The situation is still further complicated by the fact that the Ruthenians are not confined to Austrian Poland, but exist in large numbers in south-west Russia; and the nineteenth century saw a revival amongst the Ruthenians, which gave rise to a movement but little understood in England—the Ukraine movement—and one which is closely bound up with what is known as the Polish question.

The Ruthenians, or Little Russians, who inhabit the western districts of the Bukovina, practically the whole of eastern Galicia as far as Przemysl and several Russian "governments," such as Podolia, Volkynia and Kieff, form a compact racial mass of some 30,000,000 souls,

occupying the territory between the Dnieper and the Carpathians, and overflowing into Hungary. Russia regards the Ruthenians as an integral portion of the Russian race, whereas Austria has encouraged them to regard themselves as forming a special nationality apart. The Ruthenians speak a language of their own, and here again Russia and Austria hold divergent views, for the former Power asserts that Ruthenian is a Russian dialect, whereas Austrian philologists claim that it is a Slav tongue, differing essentially from both Russian and Polish. The dispute concerning the language has been used for political ends, and has given rise to a claim on the part of the inhabitants of the Ukraine for a separate political existence. This claim was for long opposed both by the Poles of Galicia and by the Russians; by the former because it threatened to set the peasant class and the lower orders generally against the dominant caste of landowning Poles in Galicia, and by the Russians since it was opposed to Pan-Slav ideals and implied the breaking away of a portion of the Russian Empire. Just prior to the insurrection in 1863 the Poles had made common cause with Russia when Ukrainophil agitation was particularly pronounced, and the Poles had insistently urged on Russia to nip the agitation in the bud.

The attitude of Austria towards the Ukraine question underwent a complete change towards the end of the nineteenth century. Originally Vienna was hostile to the scheme, and supported the Galician Poles in their efforts to suppress it; but about 1890 Austria came to an understanding with Germany as to the necessity of weakening Russia, and the Ukraine question gave Bismarck the opportunity he desired. Thereafter Austria encouraged the Ukrainophils in their dreams of independence. The language was officially recognised. A number of Ruthene professorships were created at the University of Lemberg, and even the currency was employed for the purpose of political propaganda. The Austrian side of every Austro-Hungarian bank note bore an inscription in Ruthene as well as in Polish, to which Russia retorted by the surreptitious circulation of Russian roubles in Eastern Galicia, so that the peasant might draw the conclusion from the image and superscription that the Great White Tsar was their rightful ruler. The situation was further complicated by the religious factor, for whereas the Poles are Catholics and the Russians members of the Orthodox Church, the Ruthenians of Galicia are nearly all Uniats, *i.e.*, members of that portion of the Greek Church which, in 1595, became united to

the See of Rome and professes a religion Roman Catholic in doctrine but Orthodox in rite.

Summed up, this rather complex problem, in which language, religion and politics are intermingled, may be stated as follows. Austria, supported and financed by Germany, aimed at the creation of an autonomous, if not an independent, State, to be called the Ukraine or "Borderland." To the formation of this State, Russia and Austria would be called upon to surrender territory, for the Ukraine would consist of Eastern Galicia, part of the Bukovina and the Little Russian districts of eastern Russia. Towards the attainment of this end the Ukrainers, with the help of Vienna, were aiming at, amongst other measures, the ejection of the Polish landlord and authorities from eastern Galicia, the ultimate goal being a Ukraine to be formed under Austrian suzerainty, when, with German help, Russia might have been duly defeated and dismembered.

The effect of this policy on the part of Austria was not unnaturally to estrange the Austrian Poles. For more than fifty years they had been amongst the most loyal subjects of the House of Hapsburg; but the prospect of being sacrificed to the designs of Germany and of being forced to co-operate with the Ruthenians, whom they regard as their inferiors—was galling. The con-

servative Polish aristocracy, therefore, held aloof from a movement led chiefly by the sons of the Greek United clergy and others of low social status, and in 1912, when war between Austria and Russia seemed likely to break out over the Balkans, the sympathies of the Austrian Poles were undoubtedly with Russia. When the present conflict burst over Europe, and war between Austria and Russia was not only a possibility but an accomplished fact, the position of the Poles in Galicia was a delicate one. On the one side was Austrian rule, which had been mild and conciliatory, though suspected of being, of late years, under German domination. On the other side was the tradition of Russia's autocratic governance. The proclamation of the Grand Duke Nicholas, already quoted,* might have rallied them to the side of Russia. But it came too late. Before its issue the Austrian Poles had been compelled to come to a decision. And on the day after the issue of the Grand Duke's manifesto a conference of Polish members of the Galician Diet was held at Cracow, which passed a formal resolution affirming the loyalty of the Austrian Poles to the Hapsburg Monarchy.

* *See* p. 263.

CONCLUSION

WHEN the Great European War is at an end the Polish question will take a prominent place in the deliberations of the Peace Congress which must be held. In anticipation of that assembly, and practically since the first shot was fired, an immense amount of literature has been put forth by Polish writers bearing on this delicate question which cries for settlement when hostilities are concluded. These efforts, it must be confessed, are distinguished, as a rule, by a vagueness which leaves the enquiring reader in considerable doubt as to what the national aspirations of the more enlightened Poles really are; and, on that account, the following letter written in February 1917 by a well-known Pole to an American paper is to be welcomed for its briefness and clarity. He writes as follows :—

No permanent peace in Europe is possible without a just settlement of the Polish question.

The only settlement desired by the Poles and solving the problem is :—

(1) The Polish territories of Galicia, Silesia, Posen, Prussia, and Russia must be united in one national Polish State.

(2) Poland must have a democratic government.

(3) Poland must have access to the sea by getting back the outlet of the Vistula River, the port of Danzig, which was Polish up to 1793. The new Poland could not progress without access to the seas.

(4) Poland must be absolutely independent, commercially and politically, of Germany and Russia.

(5) Poland's freedom must be guaranteed by the Great Powers.

Such is the only settlement desired by all Poles and all Poland's true friends.

If this letter means anything, it means that both victor and vanquished in the terrible contest which broke out in 1914 must agree to make great territorial sacrifices to call the Lazarus of Europe from his tomb. But that the rivals of three years will voluntarily make such amends seems scarcely more probable than that a movement will be set on foot to bring the Ottoman Turks back to the walls of Vienna or to re-introduce the Saracens into Spain. The fate of Poland is one, indeed, on which it is difficult even to hazard a wide solution. The Polish question is closely interwoven with other and vaster European problems. As these lines are penned, the whole fabric of modern Europe is shaken by events in Russia, where the Emperor is deposed, if not actually a captive, and the House of Romanov is apparently at an end. He would be a bold man who would pretend to foresee how

this upheaval will affect the Polish problem. Bolder certainly than the author, who studiously refrains from prophecy, and whose aim has merely been to set forth, as clearly as he may, the main facts in the history of the most unfortunate and not the least noble of European peoples.

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